

BRITAIN'S BEST PC GAMES MAG

PCZONE.CO.UK

PCZONE

ISSUE 205 APRIL 2009

SHOCK REPORT!
DAWN OF WAR II
Our conclusive verdict inside

WIN!
TINY COMPO

Exactly how many nanoseconds are there in one calendar day?

PCZONE
PRESENTS

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SINGULARITY
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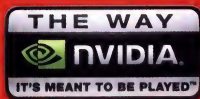


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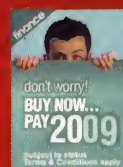
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SLOW STARTS

WHAT A ROLLERCOASTER month. A new year always starts off at a slow pace, but we reckon this was worst than usual with many companies waiting until at least the third week of January to start to do any work. While we despaired, blaming the credit crunch, a glimmer of hope appeared and then before we knew it announcements and news started arriving, and literally flooded our inboxes.

As a result we've got the scoop on 2009's top 10 shooters, spearheaded by *Singularity* on page 36, which having witnessed first hand, stitches together a selection of amazing concepts which certainly made my head spin – "errrm, what year are we in again?" – so you can add me to the array of people starting the year off at a slow pace then.

Next, Bethesda confirmed the next piece of downloadable content for *Fallout 3*, *The Pitt*, that's headed our way very soon and delivered *Operation Anchorage* just in time to secure the first review of it on page 66.

As for everything else... that would be telling. You'll just have to wait for the rest of the exciting stuff we have planned – including my debut in the forums, just as soon as I pluck up the courage! – but it's going to make 2009 a good year for PCZONE.

As for that snow we had at the start of the month, it didn't stop the team battling through blizzards to make sure we met deadlines. That's dedication!

Ali Wood

Ali Wood,
Editor

ali.wood@futurenet.com

THE TOP
10 SHOOTERS OF
2009

36

COVER STORY

THE TOP TEN SHOOTERS OF 2009

We check out the hottest shoot-'em-ups that are heading your way over the next 12 months



66

FALLOUT 3: OPERATION ANCHORAGE

Are Bethesda keeping the spirit of *Fallout* alive?



32

BURNOUT PARADISE



22

WALLACE AND GROMIT



46

SAINTS ROW 2

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Cyborg gaming mouse
absolutely free.

See page 102



B-movie madness
is on its way in
Singularity.

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Fight magic wielding
frog-men in *Savage 2*,
on the DVD.

100
ONLINE ZONE
FIGHT CLUB!
ZONE CHAT!
RANTING!
BLOGS!

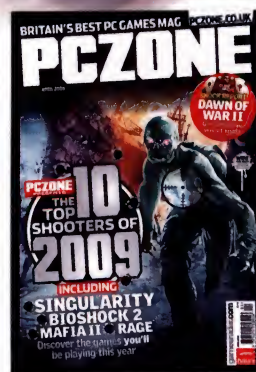
36

DAWN OF WAR II

We never thought we'd see this,
so will DOW2 match our hopes?



WHAT'S ON THE COVER?



36 TOP 10 SHOOTERS OF 2009

Too busy? *PC ZONE* in 80 words...

Wallace and Gromit! We have the actual Wallace and Gromit in this magazine on page 22. Does that beat having the best shooters of 2009, previews of the next BioWare RPG and *Burnout Paradise*, and the reviews of *Saints Row 2*, *Dawn of War II* and *Football Manager Live*? Absolutely not – because nothing can beat having the actual Wallace and Gromit in the pages of our magazine! Time to break cheese in celebration!

92 FREEWARE

Ed Zitron shoots zombies, while *David Brown* checks out the official unofficial *Broken Sword* sequel.

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Full offer details on page 102.

MEET THE TEAM



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ADAM GLICK

Freelancer?

AGE: 24

LIKES: *Ghostbusters*

DISLIKES: The dark

FANCIES: Grown-up Alma

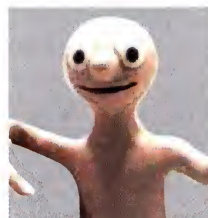
FAVOURITE GAME:

Battlefield 1942

NOW PLAYING:

Bookworm Deluxe

Glick, a grown man, once went on a rollercoaster designed for children, causing it to break down. Though he was only seven feet from the ground, the park safety team had to use a ladder to remove him from the ride. He then proceeded to fall from the ladder and break his ankle. While Glick waited to be seen at the hospital later that day, he met alleged comedian Russell Brand. Welcome, readers, to the world of Adam Glick.



JAMES ROFF

Living the dream

James has become addicted to *Football Manager Live*. When questioned on this, his response was "gg wp hf gl m8".

NOW PLAYING: *Football Manager Live*



MATT KENDALL

Mourning Tony Hart

We put a stop to our art editor's idea of running a six-page feature on the TV legend Tony Hart. So he built a shrine in the office instead.

NOW PLAYING: *Some Mac painting things*

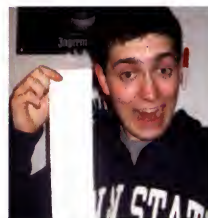


STEVE HOGARTY

Accidental history buff

Sitting next to David means Steve is exposed to a constant barrage of pointless history knowledge. He can now recite Egypt's history from King Menes to the Six Day War.

NOW PLAYING: *GTA4*

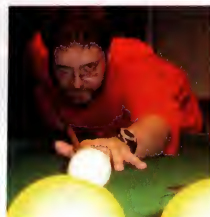


ED ZITRON

Beating up cops

Ed now spends most of his days assaulting thousands of police officers in *Saints Row 2*, only stopping once to tell us that it is "just like real life".

NOW PLAYING: *Saint's Row 2*



DAVID BROWN

Warring factions

David has been enjoying some time away from his desktop. However, he spent this time on his laptop, losing to James at *Football Manager Live* on more than one occasion.

NOW PLAYING: *Men of War*



ALI WOOD

Engaged tone

ZONE's overlord is engaged, so she was showered with confetti when she entered the office. Thanks to *PC Gamer* for providing the raw material for this show of affection.

NOW PLAYING: *Dawn of War II*

WHAT'S HELPED THIS MONTH... PRs beginning to tell us things and half-price gym memberships.

WHAT HASN'T HELPED THIS MONTH... Our internet going down, depriving us of our online buddies for too long.

What we've been talking about...

BUSINESSES 11mins Making profits yet still sacking thousands of people. Sense no make us to.

THE PREMIER LEAGUE 8mins Can Liverpool win the title after so long in the wilderness?

MANCHESTER CITY FC 6mins Kaka, Robinho, money and the usual craziness of Man Citeh.

DAWN OF WAR II 35mins The disturbing finding that it isn't quite as good as we'd hoped.

ONLINE CHESS 1mins David plays a lot of it, but is still rubbish.

CALL OF DUTY: WORLD AT WAR 19mins The co-op is good fun, although more zombie Nazi maps would be nice.

WALTZ WITH BASHIR 10mins An animated film that had our foul-tempered production editor laughing and (almost) weeping.

WHITE ZOMBIE 2mins David goes on a retro groove metal trip this month, to the annoyance of other Zoners.

TIMERANNOSAURUS REX 58mins This time-travelling lizard king would make the ideal boss character in *Singularity*.

LOTR CONQUEST 11mins Terrible, cynical cash-in or misunderstood classic? We're thinking the former.

WIN!



HOW TO ENTER TINY COMPO: For your chance to win text TINY followed by your answer, name and email address to 87474; or post your answer, name, post address and phone number to Tiny Compo, PC ZONE, Future Publishing, 2 Balcombe Street, London, NW1 6NW. The winner will be picked at random from all correct entries received and will receive a copy of *Europa Universalis III* Complete. The winner will be notified within 28 days of the closing date. Texts will be charged at 25p plus your normal network tariff. By entering this competition, you consent to us using your personal details to send you information about products and services which may be of interest to

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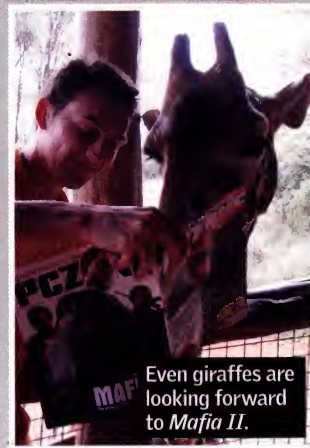
LETTERS



Steve Hogarty plucks a pile of worthy letters out from PC ZONE's bulging bag



KING OF LETTERS



MONKEYS!

I talked to you on Friday to see if the photos I have of monkeys, giraffes and me with PC ZONE magazine could be used to enter the PC ZONE Around The World feature. Attached to this email are several photos, which I'll explain below in case further information is needed.

The monkey in the photos is a wild male Blue monkey (also known as a "sykes monkey"). I took the photos at the Gedi ruins on the Kenyan coast whilst I was researching stress in the monkeys in the summer. The giraffe (called Laura) was at the giraffe park on the outskirts of Nairobi

which had recently re-opened after the violence in the capital a few weeks before. The bridge is the Latin bridge in Sarajevo where Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria was assassinated in 1914, causing WWI.

With the imminent release of *Empire: Total War* I need a new mean machine to experience naval combat on full graphics as it was intended. However I have no money at all (field work in Kenya is ridiculously expensive) so hatched this cunning plan to win free hardware.

Also I noticed most photos sent in are just a fat man next to a sign post. Hence I

sent in these pics, which I sacrificed safari shots for. Thanks for your time.

Paul Johnson

We don't know what's more amazing, the monkeys reading the magazine, the giraffe reading the magazine, or the fact that the monkeys lived in a place called Gedi ruins, which we choose to pronounce "Jedi ruins".

In return for your photos of exotic animals readin' PC ZONE, have a new motherboard, which should put you well on your way to a cock-rockin' machine.

WIN!

Want to be King of Letters? Then you'd better put pen to paper, or if you're at all PC-literate (which we're guessing you are) fingers to keyboard. The monarch gets a new MSI P45 Neo3 motherboard. The Neo3 supports Intel's Quad and Dual Core CPUs, and has an Easy OC Switch for quick overclocking, making it perfect for gamers.



DOOMED

in the december edition of pczone i read pczone newbie david jones i think slanting doom 3 saying it wasn't that good but i have to tell you thats a lot of rubbish i mean if he was a true gamer he would have known that it was one of the best in the series so good in fact that i have 2 copies of the game so shut up and stop talking nonsense

Andrew McCluskey

Well, that's us told.

NUDENESS

Censorship is an odd thing in the gaming world. From the obvious aspects of

toning down certain games from being too violent or gore-packed, to the more eyebrow-raisingly mundane changes in *Fallout 3* (the morphine/Med-X thing, for instance) and finally to the ludicrous Germans, who had to have all Nazi regalia removed from *Return to Castle Wolfenstein*, turning B.J. Blaskowicz's occult zombie death lord bashing romp into something akin to popping into Lidl's when the beans are cheap.

Oddest of all is the censorship of nudity. Some games take it tongue-in-cheek, my first encounter was the fantastic "CENSORED" box bouncing up and down in *Leisure Suit Larry*, although, this was after most players watched

A bug-addled crap-pile
or a svelte game-cake?



"The idea that gaming on consoles is cheaper than on PCs is questionable"

Larry take a dump and read the *Wall Street Journal*. For those players, washing Larry's hands after said dump resulted in death, yet the censors were concerned about pixelated bonking.

Then there's the other end of the nudity spectrum, fully embraced by *Fahrenheit*, with Carla Valenti hopping onto a stiff's stiffy. I heard the sequel calls for Jeremy Kyle-esque intervention, when Lucas skimps on the child support.

But to get to my point, I love issue 203 – especially page 20, which features a well-censored picture of *The Velvet Express*, covering all applicable man and manette parts. Then there's page 87, the *Age Of Conan* feature, with a lovely lady, two nipples censored and perhaps the best drawn vagina lips I have ever seen under a transparent garment. Now I'm going to have to check every image for secret nudity. Keep it up.

Philip Doherty

Alright, we printed a vagina. Case closed, get over it.

AIN'T DAT SPENSIVE

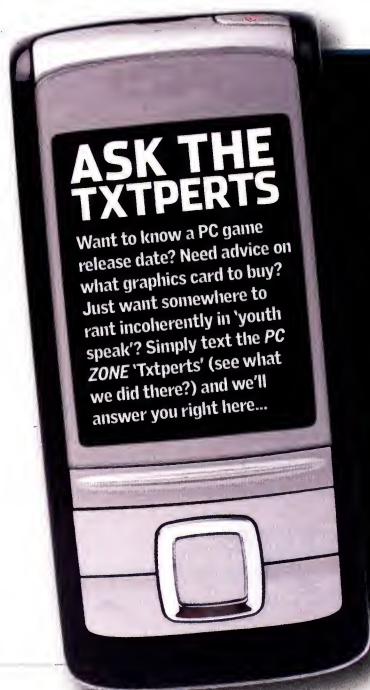
I'm writing in response to David Thompson's letter in issue 204 in which he claims that upgrading your PC is liable to put you on the street with nothing but the glow of a "measly 19in monitor" to keep you warm. This is

a fallacy. Twelve months ago, I upgraded my PC with a new graphics card, CPU, RAM, motherboard, and hard drive. The upgrade cost under £250, and runs *Crysis* on medium-to-high settings with minimal frame-rate issues.

Furthermore, the idea that gaming on consoles is cheaper than on PCs is questionable. While it's true that consoles usually cost less than PCs, console games are on average £10-£15 more expensive than PC games, an

amount which quickly adds up for anyone with even a moderate interest in gaming. Also, the functionality of PCs should be considered, as it's rather difficult to write an essay or do your Christmas shopping on an Xbox 360.

If you want a PC that glows in the dark and serves you breakfast then you'll have to fork out for it, but the truth is with most current releases being multi-format, PCs only have to keep up with the current generation of consoles in order to run those games (*GTA4* being an exception). Optimisation is becoming a prominent issue in PC gaming; consequently, as long as you have a bit of



Your new boss is hot!
Dean

Obviously, you have never seen ex-editor Jamie Sefton's legs.

Just like to ask is there going to be a new Hitman: Codename 47 game and if so when is it coming out. Thanks.
Lee

If we were to make an educated guess: yes, definitely. Expect an announcement soon.

I've never read a more generous preview than Log's article about Watchmen. It was a masterclass in seeing-the-best. Oh, but you want to like this game, don't you, Log?
Anon

Hey, it looks interesting enough... *cough*



**SEND US YOUR REVIEWS
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FAR CRY 2

Sent in by Lewis Hodgson

PC ZONE score: 90%

This game has left me divided; it has so many flaws yet still manages to be an extremely playable and enjoyable romp. There's an unfortunate lack of any storyline or characterisation when this could have made for an excellent game.

It doesn't always feel like a real world, seemingly populated only by sociopathic Africans and mercenaries; causing the only zebra I have seen so far to be tragically crushed under the mighty wheels of my three-tonne Wrangler as I fled.

However, it's still a superbly presented action game that at least allows me to don my headband and feel like Rambo for a few hours.

Your shout: 85%

A lethal sneeze.



Send your reviews with a maximum of 100 words, your name and a score to letters@pczone.co.uk. Every one printed here wins a top PC game.



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common sense, and don't buy the latest NVIDIA Monitor Exploder 3000 every other week, you'll find that PC gaming isn't expensive at all.

Richard Lane

Well put. We should also roll out all the usual guff about mods and freeware and an open-development platform and all of the other advantages of gaming on a PC – these are exactly the reasons why we're prepared to spend a little extra on the hardware. And it even partially validates our natural smugness as PC owners.

ART ATTACK

I'm a student studying a diploma in media and on my course I've got really into designing magazine layouts. I was wondering what the job title is of the person at your magazine who makes the layouts and whether it's the only thing they do for their job, or whether they do other things like writing articles. Thanks in advance and love the mag.

Sam

We've got two guys on the **PC ZONE** team who handle page layouts: deputy art editor James and art editor Matt. We deposit our words into their grasping, clammy mitts and they turn it into all of this stuff you see before you, the clever bastards.

Typically they don't do a lot of writing (aside from the odd caption), but they do approve pages. So there you go, a glimpse at the inner workings of the mag. Fascinating!



Sadly no longer available. The hoodies too.

SUB-STANDARD

It's properly unfair that new subscribers get offered free things every month! I've been subscribing for two years, and I think it's only fair that medium to long-term subscribers get something free too!

You know we're loyal, we've been hanging about for ages; new subscribers might just be subscribing for the beautiful free mouse this month!

Andrew Savage

It's a bit unfair, but it happens everywhere all the time. Banks attract new customers with special offers, phone companies attract new customers with free phones, and our subscriptions department attract new subscribers with free mice. Try convincing a room full of marketing

suits to send free things to current readers and you'll leave with laughter ringing in your ears. Still, we try to reward long-term readers by offering you lovely competitions to win PCs and things. See? We do care.

RISING DAMP

I'm yet another one of those people who have been a subscriber for years, and love the mag like no other (although I did buy one issue of *PC Gamer* way back in 1999, but it was a bit naff, so I didn't bother again). I like the look of the new team as well. I merely write to enquire why my issue 204 was wrinkled and felt a bit damp when I eagerly removed it from its sealed, shiny plastic wrappings.

Is this a new policy to increase the realism of the reading experience by actually incorporating your very blood, sweat and tears into the paper itself? Or did someone just drop it? Either way, it's made it a bit less brilliant, and, not wanting to tarnish my reading experience, may I politely enquire whether I could have another? I'd be eternally grateful and all that jazz.

Fred Betts

Yeah, sorry about that. We were just trying something out with some of the magazines. It didn't really work out, and now they're wet. On a related matter, does anyone know how to dispose of a dolphin corpse?

HOODIES

Waaazaaaaaa! Can I please have a *PC ZONE* hoodie because I subscribe to the



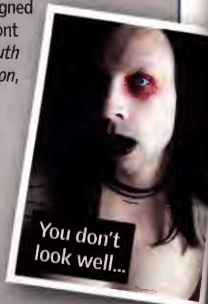
LOST IN THE POST

LETTERS FROM A DECADE AGO, ANSWERED TODAY

THE DOPE SHOW

I've an idea for a game that would fit in with your inimitable editorial style: *PC Abuser*. It would be a game where you insult all those humourless bastards who make life on this planet less pleasurable than it could be. You fire round upon round of insults until their heads explode in messy *Scanners* fashion. Different levels would feature different cretins who have campaigned against such Y-front dampeners as *South Park*, *Carmageddon*, *Bad Taste* and *Marilyn Manson*. Whaddya think?

Brooker mocked your admiration of Marilyn Manson last time we printed your letter Mat, but in the 10 years hence it's transpired that Manson's an oddly down-to-earth and very self-aware fellow. When he's not dressing up like a twat, that is.



magazine and I want to look 'bear' hard like Steve and Log too!

If you had £30 and you could get one game this year what would you get?

And where are you pre-ordering *Down of War II* from?

Charlie

Wazaa, Charlie. The official *PC ZONE* hoodies flew off the shelves like hot, hooded-cakes last year, so we've no more. As for our games: David would spend his £30 on *Empire: Total War*, I'd grab *Mafia II*, and Ali would pick up *Batman: Arkham Asylum*. And where are we pre-ordering? I don't think we're allowed to say, but ummm Play.com. **W**

PCZONE AROUND THE WORLD



We want photos of you with *PC ZONE* in the most exotic or inappropriate locations. Candid celeb shots count double. Every one printed wins a prize!

The Dark Eye

DRAKENSANG

FIND ALLIES

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COVER STORY

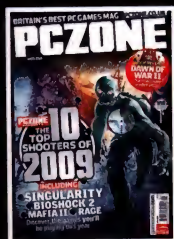
PCZONE
PRESENTS

THE TOP SHOOTERS OF 2009

Discover the shooters
you'll be playing all
through 2009...

PAGE

36



TIME TRAVEL IS in fashion again. Things haven't been this exciting since *Quantum Leap*, and now with TV shows like *Lost* leaning heavily on incredibly confusing time travel storylines, it's only a matter of time (hah!) until models are walking backwards down the catwalk and talking in reverse. *Singularity* is about to capitalise on the re-emergence of our favourite ancillary dimension by way of its Time Manipulation Device - the gadget strapped to the back of our hero's hand. With it, he can reverse objects through time, propel them into the future, resurrect derelict freighters and rapidly age people into skeletons. It's one of our top 10 shooters of 2009 - check out the rest from page 40.

**PCZONE**

UPFRONT

Everything that matters in the **world of PC gaming**

Commute shoot

I HAVE A dream journey to work. Whereas getting to my old job took me over an hour, I can now make it to my desk in less than 30 minutes. So you'd think I'd be happy; but things are starting to grate on me in the morning – people who put their bags on seats, talk on their phones, play (rubbish) music on their iPods really loudly, take up more room than they really should... the list goes on. Why do people feel they need to take up so much of my personal space? Grrr.

Rant over, professionally the real debate is whether Microsoft are still fully committed to PC gaming as studios are closed and they focus on the Xbox 360. Thankfully other companies are ploughing ahead with their plans to release some stellar PC games this year, with the likes of *Empire: Total War*, *The Sims 3* and *StarCraft II* all due for release in 2009. While that's all well and good our attentions have turned to what shooting games will be around, and we came up with a definitive list of 10 which we think you should own.

Singularity, the newcomer that graces our cover, looks like the most interesting of the batch, but who can deny the appeal of *BioShock 2*, *Mafia II*, *OpFlash 2*, and *Rage*? I can't help but wonder if there's something missing from this list though. Can't someone develop a game which involves blasting the shit out of my fellow commuters? That'd avoid my commute turning into *Falling Down*.

Ali Wood

Ali Wood, editor

PITTIFUL!

More downloadable content coming soon for *Fallout 3*DEVELOPER Bethesda Game Studios PUBLISHER Bethesda Softworks WEBSITE fallout.bethsoft.com ETA End Feb

Post-war Pittsburgh looks stunning.

**PCZONE
EXCLUSIVE**

"Interaction is possible with raiders, so you don't just have to blow their faces off"

FOLLOWING ON FROM *Operation Anchorage* (page 66), Bethesda are continuing to swell *Fallout 3*'s gaming coffers by revealing details of the second phase of downloadable content.

The events of *The Pitt* will take place in the city of Pittsburgh and consists of a large dungeon area, an abandoned steel yard and a settlement split into two

halves; one for slaves and the other for the masters. It's a very vertical space with lots of catwalks and open-faced buildings, where interaction is now possible with raiders, so you don't just have to blow their faces off all the time.

The story involves the infiltration of The Pitt disguised as a slave. You'll have to find work and ultimately look for an audience with the raider boss who claims to have created a cure for

mutations. It's a morally ambiguous tale with no right or wrong options, just choices to make and factions to side with.

Finally, there are several new types of raider armour to procure, plus new weapons and gear including the AutoAxe, a powerful new melee weapon that makes a change from just using bats and clubs.

**STOP
PRESS!**

WARHEAD DEFUSED

It's now possible to use a revoke tool to de-authorise an installation of *Crysis Warhead* and thereby avoid the limited installs thing EA persist with.

GIFT HORSE

If support@steampowered.com tries to give you *Far Cry 2*, beware the attack of the phishers. You can't say you weren't warned now. If in doubt, reject it.

JUST A STORY

Lionhead have denied they're working on a PC version of *Fable II*, although this hasn't stopped virtually everyone saying "Yeah, but it will be coming, won't it?"

36

Top 10 Shooters

This year's shooters we can't wait for.



46

Saints Row 2

Is this port an epic, or an epic fail?



56

Dawn of War II

The long-awaited sequel is here.



Oh those clever Wastelanders.



One of *The Pitt's* incredible new killing tools.

STUFF

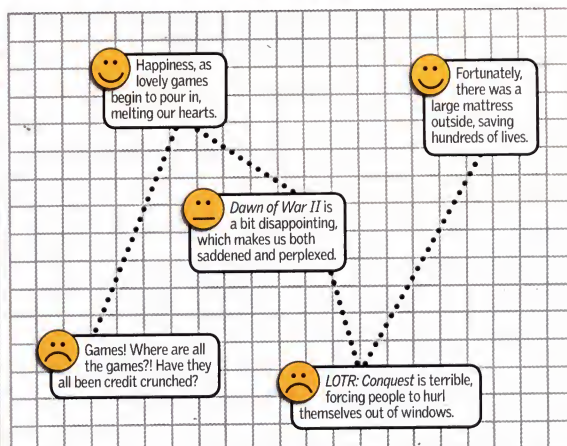
Will *Hellgate: London* stay alive after all? The Korean company who currently own the rights to the game, HanbitSoft, have spoken about how the game could continue as a free-to-play game. This is a bit of a kick in the knackers for those who decided to pay out for the game, but at least it could potentially mean they can continue playing, which is probably acceptable in the long run. HanbitSoft also promise various improvements, balance tweaks, patches and increased community strengthening.

Life is a roller coaster

GOOD TIMES

ON THE FENCE

BAD TIMES



IT BEGINS AGAIN

SHIT! HOW LONG LEFT?

DEADLINE

CLOSED FOR REPAIRS

Patch work makes perfect. Or is it a case of too little too late, wonders *Pavel Barter*



Reporter
Pavel Barter

YOU CRADLE THE game in your arms, boot it up, then an hour later you're swearing like a sailor. Either the game isn't loading properly, it

crashes at a critical stage, or the graphics are bollocks. Sounds familiar? For anyone who has encountered the PC releases of *Grand Theft Auto IV*, *Tomb Raider Underworld* or *STALKER: Clear Sky*, or pretty much any PC game in recent times, it probably does. And so will the inevitable process of downloading a patch that promises to mend these digital wounds.

For developers making patches is as much part of the job as long hours and pizza stains, and in the worst scenarios, it means repairing a game that's virtually unplayable. "If there's a bug that's crashing proceedings, God forbid, we will do everything it takes to release the patch as soon as possible," says Sam Cordier, communications chap for Codemasters. "It doesn't matter what it

takes in development time, cost, money, we'll do it. If a game is not playable or functional, and people have paid for it... We can't allow that to happen."

That sounds good, but why release a game with such serious bugs in the first place? You wouldn't pay for a meal in a restaurant and expect to find snot in your soufflé, and it's not as if developers don't put the work in during the creation process. Codemasters, for example, ramp up their QA teams in accordance to the size of a game.

BUG HUNT

"With a game like *Race Driver: GRID*, our testers batter through every single track, every single menu system, every single everything," says Cordier. On something like *FUEL*, which is much larger on an area-basis than *GRID*, we ramped up our team exponentially. A QA team of 50 worked on *GRID* towards the end of it; on *FUEL* we started with 40 and will probably end with about 100."

The biggest problem developers face is that no matter how much testing they



Lara should have looked before backflipping.

do, they can't duplicate the amount of testing that occurs when the game is live. Suddenly, the QA team leaps from 100 to hundreds of thousands. "Sometimes bugs that the dev team couldn't find during production appear when thousands of players play a game," explains Gaetan Richard, multiplayer producer for *Far Cry 2*.

Problems with *Left 4 Dead* (eg physics errors and map exploits), only emerged after the game was released. "We continue to play our own games after release," says Valve's Chet Faliszek. "So we most often see the issues in the wild that need to be addressed. We also get feedback from the community through emails, forum posts and during play sessions with the public."

Nevertheless, when a patch emerges shortly after a game has been released or, worse still, before a game has even hit the shelves, you have to wonder if devs are doing their jobs. *Spore* was out barely two weeks before its patch emerged. Due to publisher demands and release date constraints, developers sometimes knowingly ship glitchy games. And, whereas console cartridges once put a full stop on the development process, the PC medium is ripe for online updates and repairs.

You wouldn't find the patch phenomenon in literature, music or film, but then they don't incorporate the digital intricacies, the huge possibilities for error, found in games. The earliest patch can be traced back to 1984 and *Jet Set Willy*. The game's publishers offered a crate of champagne to the first person who could find all the objects in the game, and after the winner also unearthed some bugs, the publishers released a crude version of the modern patch: you'd stop your cassette tape, mid-loading, type in code and overcome the gremlins.

PATCHING IS WORK

These days, patch making requires loads of testing. It's also lengthier time wise. "I don't think you'll find many developers who are particularly fond of patching software – it seems like an almost ongoing process," contends Martyn Brown, studio head at Team 17, the UK team behind *Worms* and the upcoming *Leisure Suit Larry: Box Office Bust*.

Time constraints explain why *BioShock* didn't get its patch until about four months after release, and why Bethesda took so long to create their *Fallout 3* band aid. "How long does it take to release a patch? It depends on what



Yes, you still get shot at when hanggliding.



"The patch is not a dirty secret. They're as much about extra features and functions as they are bug repairs"

features are there," continues Brown. "If it's small fixes and tweaks, probably a week to four weeks. But patches can take a lot longer."

Some patches take two months to create, as was the case with *Call of Duty: World at War* – publishers (or conduits, like Games for Windows – LIVE) often demand approval, further lengthening the process. In turn this requires a developer's commitment long after the game has been wrapped. Creating a patch for a game like *Crysis*, for example, is a full-time job for around 10 people, according to Eric Lagel, multiplayer producer at Crytek. "It is like a mini game team. In many ways, we release a patch the same way we release a game, the difference is that patches/updates are distributed online and are free."

For developers, the patch is not a dirty secret or the elephant in the room. After all, patches are as much about extra features and functions as they are bug repairs. They stay in tune with the community, moulding the game to the actions and desires of its fanbase.

BUGS DO GOOD

"As we watch our community interact with our games, we see them play in ways we never imagined," says Valve's Faliszek. "Taking advantage of the ability to update the product based on this is one of the best ways to give value to the customer – continue to update the product after its release and have the game grow along with the community."

A game without patches is a noble intention in a solo game, but would you



The Vampire's kiss

When Troika Games imploded, modders began patching *Vampire: The Masquerade – Bloodlines*. Five years after the game's release, Werner Spahl continues to nurse Troika's flawed masterpiece.

Q What was it about *Vampire* that compelled you to create patches for the game?

A I recognised more and more what a great game it is and how bad the state it was released in because Troika went under. I made other mods before, for *Half-Life*, and always liked to restore hidden content. Overall I would say that *Vampire* is the best game I ever played. I haven't seen another game to rival it. *Fallout 3* is great but the storyline and dialogue are a joke compared to *Vampire*.

How many patches have you made for *Vampire*?

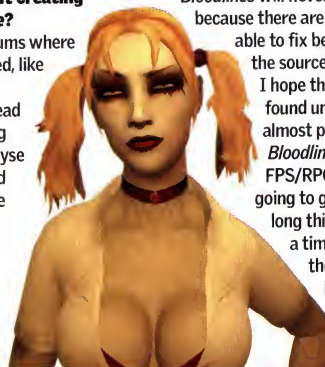
Starting from version 1.3, I've made over 50 patches. At the start there were a lot of side quest breakers and issues with dialogue. Fixing graphical bugs – like floating objects – followed later, but the most interesting aspect was the restoration of hidden content that was unfinished when the game was released: weapons, disciplines, models, items, dialogues and more.

Is *Vampire* now fault-free?

Bloodlines will never be fault-free because there are problems I'll never be able to fix because I don't have the source code or an SDK. But I hope that fewer bugs will be found until the game will be almost perfect. But because *Bloodlines* is as complex as a FPS/RPG is probably ever going to get, I don't know how long this will take. There was a time when I thought that the latest patch would be the last and final one. I don't believe that anymore.

How do you go about creating a patch for *Vampire*?

I monitor several forums where bug reports are posted, like Planet Vampire or GameBanshee, and read emails I get regarding the game. I then analyse the issues, and fix and test the results. There are several board regulars who replay each new patch release and provide feedback on the whole of the game.



really want an online multiplayer title that couldn't be updated?

"Multiplayer games are not predictable, due to the impact of human interaction," says Crytek's Lagel. "Such games need constant attention as players discover new strategies (re-balance needs), new exploits or hacks (security or anti-cheat needs), or demand new environments (maps, weapons, features)."

"In the end, I believe that updates support the game community more than anything. Check any successful game online, and you'll see that none have lasted without releasing patches."

Nothing is more frustrating than a buggy game, and perhaps some teams need to rethink their quality assurance

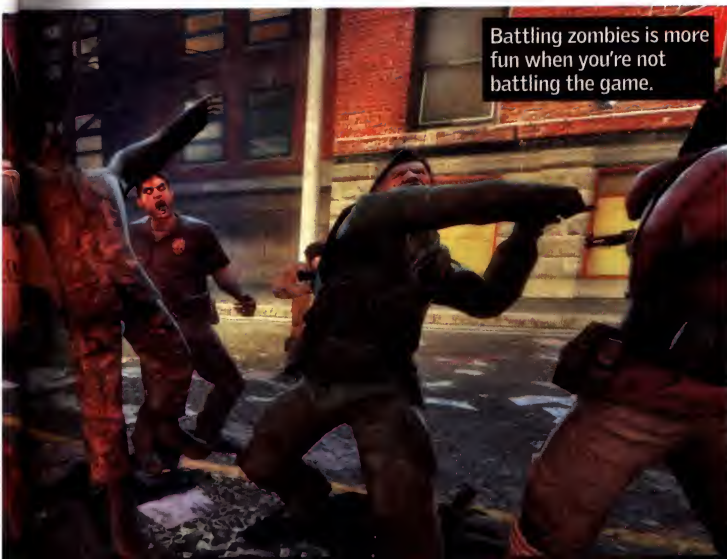
testing, but at least developers don't abandon us like unwanted infants.

With an increasing amount of developers sticking around after they've finished making the game and keeping an eye on the community, as long as you scream loud enough, your needs will probably be met. **PCZ**

Is there anything you want Pavel Barter to investigate? (Warning: some jobs might be considered too big or too small...)

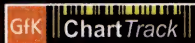
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✉ pavel barter, pc zone,
2 balcombe st, london, nw1 6nw



PCZONE Charts

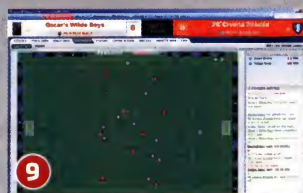
Official data compiled by



- 1 **FOOTBALL MANAGER 2009**
Issue 202 - 90%
- 2 **WORLD OF WARCRAFT: WRATH OF THE LICH KING**
Issue 202 - 86%
- 3 **NEW THE SIMS 2: DOUBLE DELUXE**
N/A
- 4 **COMMAND & CONQUER: RED ALERT 3**
Issue 201 - 86%
- 5 **CALL OF DUTY: WORLD AT WAR**
Issue 202 - 84%
- 6 **GRAND THEFT AUTO IV**
Issue 203 - 91%
- 7 **FALLOUT 3**
Issue 201 - 91%
- 8 **SPORE**
Issue 199 - 95%
- 9 **NEW FOOTBALL MANAGER LIVE**
Issue 205 - 85%
- 10 **LEFT 4 DEAD**
Issue 202 - 93%
- 11 **THE SIMS 2: APARTMENT LIFE**
N/A
- 12 **WORLD OF WARCRAFT: BATTLE CHEST**
N/A
- 13 **FAR CRY 2**
Issue 201 - 90%
- 14 **NEW THE LORD OF THE RINGS: CONQUEST**
Issue 205 - 43%
- 15 **NEW WARHAMMER 40,000: DAWN OF WAR COMPLETE**
Issue 194 - 82%
- 16 **NEW MIRROR'S EDGE**
Issue 204 - 71%
- 17 **TOMB RAIDER: UNDERWORLD**
Issue 202 - 76%
- 18 **RE BROTHERS IN ARMS: HELL'S HIGHWAY**
Issue 200 - 86%
- 19 **CIVILIZATION IV: COLONIZATION**
Issue 200 - 88%
- 20 **RE CRYSIS**
Issue 188 - 92%

**8****SPORE**

Still selling well, despite a backlash amongst critics and serious players. So it seems the humpasaurs will live on.

**9****FOOTBALL MANAGER LIVE**

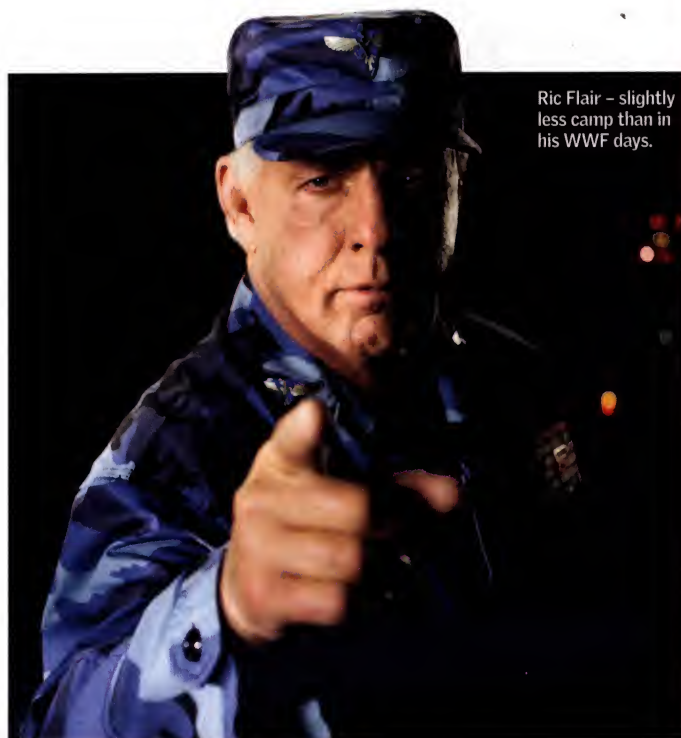
Live out your soccer dreams with this animated spreadsheet, and compete with thousands of other soccer obsessives.

**16****MIRROR'S EDGE**

A first-person shooter, in which you don't shoot. This game is proof that innovation doesn't always make a really good game.

**19****CIVILIZATION IV: COLONIZATION**

Your chance to attempt genocide against agrarian Native Americans, and beat up your head of state of this fair island.



Ric Flair - slightly less camp than in his WWF days.

TO BE THE MAN, BEAT THE MAN

'Nature Boy' puts the Soviets in a figure-4

WEBSITE commandandconquer.com/redalert ETA TBA

THE 16-TIMES WORLD heavyweight wrestling champion Ric 'Nature Boy' Flair is going to be just one of the many new actors involved in *Red Alert 3: Uprising*.

Flair will play Commander Hill, while other performers getting involved in the project are Holly Valance (*Neighbours*), Jodi Lyn O'Keefe (*Prison Break*), Malcolm McDowell (*Clockwork Orange*) and Jamie Chung (*Samurai Girl* - nope, never heard of it either). Fans will also get the chance to watch Gemma Atkinson and Ivana Milicevic, among others, return for some brand-new scenes.

"I had a great time on set and while I may have retired from the ring, I think my fans are going to love seeing the 'Nature Boy' style and profile his way

to victory," Flair said. "I know my kids are going to have a great time trying to take it to me on the battlefield." Flair will be one of the characters you can take on in Commander's Challenge, a series of 50 battles that get increasingly more difficult as you proceed.

As well as wrestling legends, *Uprising* will also be providing new units for the existing factions.

"The Allies get the Pacifier. Its primary mode is an anti-infantry twin gun that's pretty powerful," said Amer Ajami, executive producer on the project. "Its secondary mode deploys it as an artillery cannon. It can't move in this mode, but it's devastating against long-range targets."

Ajami described the Empire of the Rising Sun's Giga Fortress as "probably the most devastating unit in the history of RTS games. We thought what the hell," he said, "why not go for broke."

"Its secondary mode transforms it into a giant floating face that only has an air-to-ground weapon, but it's incredibly devastating. It more or less one-shot kills any structure."

"I cheated but it takes a long, long, long time to tech up to be able to build a Giga Fortress." **PCZ**





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CHARTS STILL FAIL TO EMBRACE DOWNLOADS

Digital distribution left out in the cold

WEBSITE chart-track.co.uk

AT THE START of 2009 headlines screamed "Videogames are now more popular than ever!" and "Videogames industry now worth £4.03 billion!". Yet those figures also showed a 31% drop in PC games sold in the UK. But this is wrong, as the industry's charts don't take downloads into account. Now the chaps behind the PC charts have revealed to *ZONE* that this could soon change, potentially giving PC games sales data a big boost.

"We're negotiating with all major players in the digital download market and we

hope to convince them all to come on board," revealed Dorian Bloch, director of GfK Chart-Track – the company that makes games charts for the UK and handles music in Ireland. "This covers traditional retailers (eg Gamestation) and e-tailers (like Amazon), and the specialist download retailers, such as Direct2Drive, Metaboli and Steam. This project is fully supported by publishers and ELSPA, their UK trade body.

"For software publishers the feeling is that the seller's delivery method shouldn't mean part of their sales aren't recorded in the industry's charts."

This is certainly the case for SEGA, who admit their PC games sell far more by digital download than their console games do. For some, 10% of a year's sales come through direct downloads.

"It can vary widely, both depending on the type of game and the region," added Sebastien Courmont, Ubisoft's online sales manager for Europe, Asia and the Middle East.

"For some games, the download revenue can be almost insignificant. But for some titles the percentage can be important – up to 50%."

Nick Pili, network director for SEGA Europe finds download sales patterns are different as well: "Digital download sales tend to be steady over a longer period, rather than the initial few weeks burst which is typical in retail sales."

There are two clear benefits to digital downloads according to Pili:

choice for gamers and reach.

"Downloading is simply another way for consumers to acquire a game. This is particularly important when you consider the many thousands of digital download orders we've received from consumers in areas where SEGA games aren't in stores – South America and Africa particularly."

CHARTING SENSE

Ubisoft's Courmont points out immediacy also plays a huge factor. "It's great to know that if a gamer decides that they'd like to buy *Far Cry 2* and it's midnight on a Sunday, they'll be able to. Beyond that, it also gives us the chance to support our customers with unique services. And that's important to us."

Exactly when direct download sales will be included in the official sales charts is still not known, but GfK Chart-Track are making significant inroads to help present an accurate picture of the PC gaming market. "We've targeted the 12 or so major PC game digital

download specialists that cover Europe and America, and they represent the majority of the market in terms of full PC games," said Bloch.

"Technically, it isn't a huge challenge – we've tracked download sales for music and videos in Ireland for a number of years, and include the iTunes Store and all other players active in the music download market.

"We also track mobile phone game downloads in the UK from operators and off-portal sites, so the issue is more to do with when the PC games digital download retailers feel comfortable with supplying the data." **PCZ**

Hottest (legal) downloads

The biggest sellers aren't who you think they are

Getting publishers to talk about which games do well by download is hard, but we know *Far Cry 2*, and the *Football Manager* and *Total War* series are three big sellers.

Yet the download sales of these hits could pale next to the casual market's sales. Match-3 factory WildTangent (wildtangent.com) has been selling downloadable titles since 2001. In 2006 they claimed they'd reached 50,000 sales... a month!



Far Cry 2 is one of the most downloaded games.

Empire: Total War is expected to continue the series' trend as a popular download.

"The issue is more to do with when the PC games digital download retailers feel comfortable with the supply of data"

Dorian Bloch, GfK Chart-Track

EXCLUSIVE!

WARCRAFT SMASHES RECORDS!

Blizzard "humbled" by *Lich King's* success

WEBSITE blizzard.com

BLIZZARD HAVE REVEALED to us that *Wrath of the Lich King* has exceeded all expectations the developer had for the expansion, charming a host of new and lapsed gamers back to the community.

"We're very humbled and pleased, not only with the incredible sales results but with the community and press response for *Wrath of the Lich King*," Blizzard Entertainment told ZONE. "This initial and ongoing success exceeds all of the expectations we had set for the launch. We're always excited by the launch of a new game – we felt we had created something special, and were eager to get it into players' hands."

Within its first 24 hours of release *Wrath of the Lich King* sold more than 2.8 million copies, making it the fastest

selling PC game ever, and taking the total number of *Warcraft* subscribers to a massive 11.5 million.

"The new, compelling content has also revitalised the game for former players who have now returned," said Blizzard. "These players are eager to travel to the frozen wastes of Northrend, engage in epic open-world player-vs-player battles, confront new dungeon and raid bosses, explore every corner of Azeroth and Outland to build up their achievement points, and wield the power of the mighty new death knight."

Blizzard are also expecting the *WOW* community to grow further, although they aren't revealing much more about future targets they'd like to hit.

"Our philosophy is to focus on crafting an outstanding game experience, rather than trying to anticipate future milestones. Our teams work hard to communicate with the community, and make frequent in-game updates to ensure that playing in Azeroth remains a polished and enjoyable experience." **PCH**

"Within its first 24 hours of release *Wrath of the Lich King* sold more than 2.8 million copies"

WOW's immense popularity exceeded all expectations.



Game 4-a-date Find new love



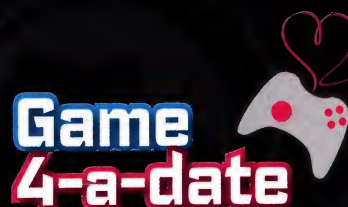
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1



WALLACE & GROMIT'S GRAND ADVENTURES

DEVELOPER Telltale PUBLISHER Telltale WEBSITE telltalegames.com/wallaceandgromit ETA March

A TELLTALE GAME featuring Wallace and Gromit is so bleedingly obvious you wonder why it hasn't already happened.

You've got your comedic two main characters, the puzzling nature of Wallace's clever contraptions, the basic "bizarre problem, off-kilter solution, comedy twist" recipe of the shorts, the wacky populations of the Aardman hivemind – the TV show is as close to a

point-and-click as TV gets. Besides, of course, *Jonathan Creek*.

So we loudly exclaimed shouts of glee when we heard that Telltale would be releasing a series of episodic adventures about the Lancastrian inventor and his unnaturally smart hound. And when these exclusive shots from the game appeared in our inbox, it called for a round of celebratory Wensleydale. **PC7**

2



**EXCLUSIVE
SCREEN
SHOTS!**

3



The Bigger Picture

1 CONTRAPTIONS

Wallace and Gromit's contraptions – designed to carry out the most mundane of tasks – are puzzles in themselves, and often need to be repaired or built.

2 CRAFTY SQUIRRELS

This squirrel steals your toast until you stop him. But Wallace doesn't mind a squirrel pawing his toast though. After all, his dog is frying the eggs.

3 THUMBIN' IT

In their efforts to recreate the look and feel of Aardman's stop-motion classics, Telltale have taken special care to texture the characters with clumsily placed thumbprints and nicks.

4 THE COLONEL

Wallace's neighbour Veteran Crum still reckons he's in the war, just like The Colonel from *Dennis the Menace*. The humour here is spot on, thanks to *Private Eye* writer Tristan Davies, whose brief was to match the tone of the shorts as closely as possible. He's succeeded.

5 I CAN'T BELIEVE IT'S NOT...

Peter Sallis won't get out of bed for less than a sponge bath and a ready meal these days, so Telltale called in the official back-up actor for Wallace. You know, the bloke who did his voice on that rubbishish novelty alarm clock you got for Christmas.

6 KOOKY CHARACTERS

New characters have been conjured up, and each one's approved by Aardman Animations. Next-door neighbour Felicity will feature in each episode, and sports a lovely pearl necklace.

4



5



6



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Actual in-game screenshots

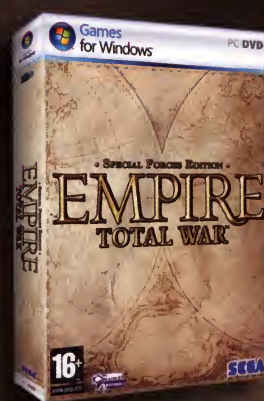


www.totalwar.com





OUT MARCH



*Special Forces
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 Games for Windows

GUN FETISHISTS DELIGHT...

GRIN WHEN YOU'RE WINNING

Terminator Salvation and *Wanted: Weapons of Fate* are here

IN THESE DAYS of fast-pace games development, it's terribly unfashionable to be seen spending all of your time, effort and creativity on just one game. To be simultaneously conjuring up two is proof that your boundless vision cannot be confined to a single product. To this effect, GRIN Barcelona and GRIN Stockholm are working on *Terminator Salvation* and *Wanted: Weapons of Fate*, both based on huge movie licenses, and both existing to complement their respective progenitors.

"We had a look at a lot of the *Terminator* games that had come prior to this," claims Mic Rogers of Halcyon, the folks holding on to *Terminator* license, "and they didn't do well. I mean, the differences between those and *Terminator Salvation* is... they were shit. We want to avoid that."

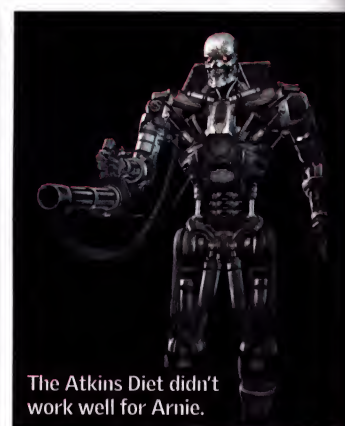
Certainly one way of avoiding being shit is to pile in every feature available to a third-person action shooter – a clever cover system, fun weapons from the movie, and "unrelenting intelligent robotic enemies". So you can expect

a highly polished, *Gears of War*-style affair, that will act as a prequel to the movie by a full two years, and a decent bit of primer for the Christian Bale-powered soon-to-be blockbuster.

Will it blow your tits off? Will it buck the long-running trend of mediocre-at-best movie tie-ins? Unlikely, but that GRIN haven't fallen back on the age-old formula of crappy levels interspersed with FMVs from the movie shows that there's a lot to be excited about here.

Wanted: Weapons of Fate follows a similarly original path. Set after the events of the movie (which still have nothing to do with the graphic novel, which actually features a man made out of shit), you control Wesley Gibson and his bullet-bending talents.

Clever cover systems abound yet again in this third-person shooter, but Gibson's ability to curve the path of bullets lends an interesting edge to the combat, and the slow-motion (which GRIN have admitted is "like in *Max*



The Atkins Diet didn't work well for Arnie.



A can of Raid won't get rid of that bug.

"Expect a polished, *Gears of War*-style affair that will act as a prequel to the movie"

Payne"), while unoriginal, is put to great use. There are no men made of crap, true, but you can shoot bullets out of the air.

With a 24 March release, expect a review of *Wanted: Weapons of Fate* in the next issue. And unless something goes wrong, *Terminator Salvation* will follow in May. **PC**

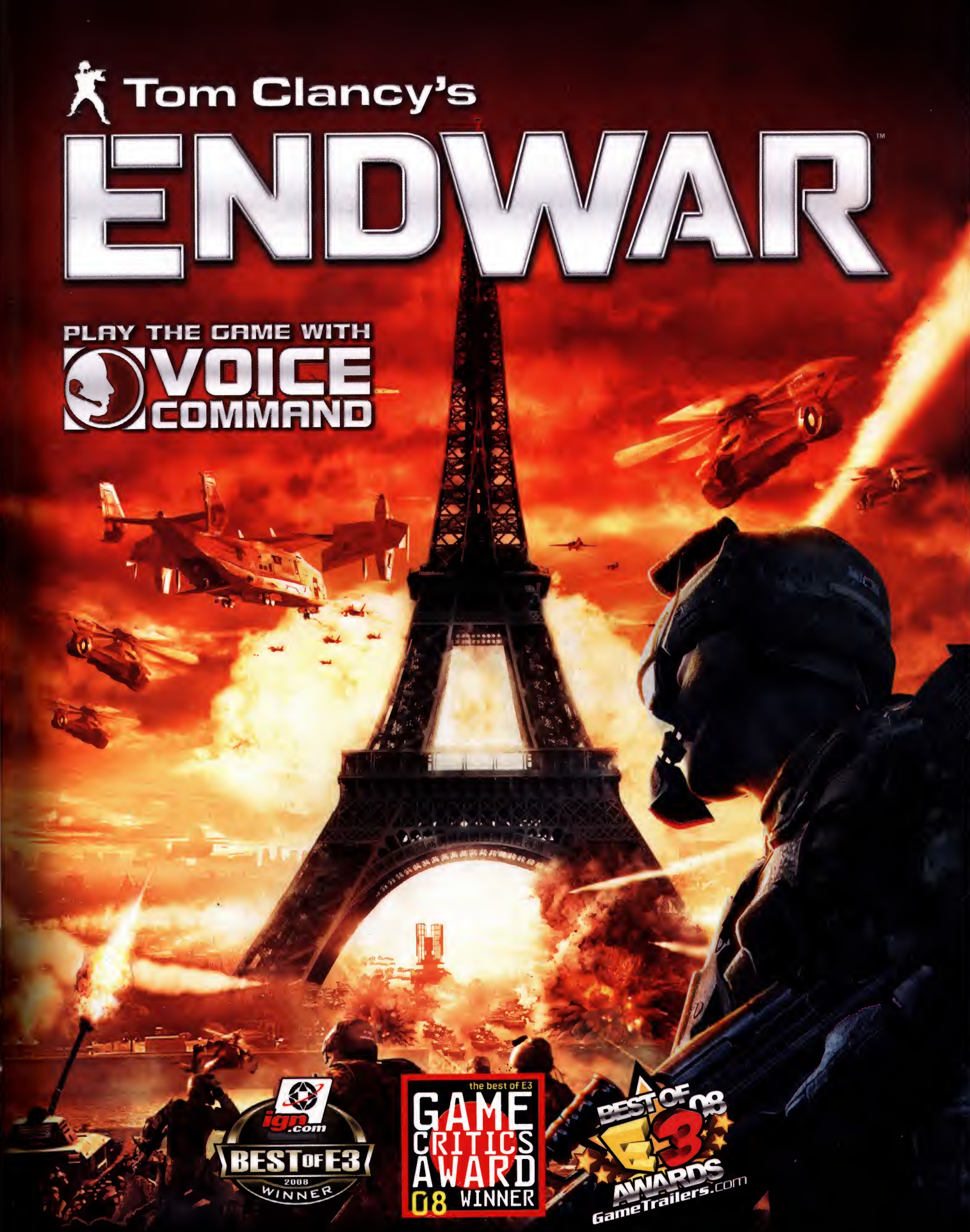
Of course, this was the day Toby forgot to pack his rockets.



Tom Clancy's

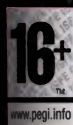
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A bad case of crabs.



Yet another RTS clone army.

THE PERFECT STORM

ETA
SPRING
2009

Ali Wood commands some answers about Creative Assembly's new project, *Stormrise*

DEVELOPER Creative Assembly PUBLISHER SEGA WEBSITE sega.com/stormrise



Ken Turner,
Producer - *Stormrise*

HAVING PROVEN THEIR might with the *Total War* series, Creative Assembly have turned their attentions to a new game, *Stormrise*, promising a twist on the classic RTS genre. With the Australian division entrusted with development duties, producer Ken Turner updates us ahead of its spring launch.

Q Can you give us some background to *Stormrise*'s world and its storyline?

A *Stormrise* is based on Earth. In the near future, an environmental experiment goes awry and this triggers a super-storm that engulfs the whole of the Earth's atmosphere.

A small proportion of the population slept out the storm in underground hibernation and, many centuries later, these humans re-emerge as the Echelon.

Most of those left on the surface perished. Some were able to adapt, evolving and mutating into something more than human. This branch of mankind became known as the Sai and they've traded part of their humanity for the power of survival.

Both the Sai and Echelon have lived together in a relative peace for years. However, there are small branches in the principal hierarchy that are starting to distrust each other, this is where we start the game.

What sets *Stormrise* apart from other RTS games and who's going to like it?

Our original focus was to make a compelling RTS game that worked as well on the home consoles as it does on PC. The obvious roadblock was controls, so we developed Whip Select (the control system used in *Stormrise*) to solve this. As it stands, the Whip Select controls have translated really well to the keyboard/mouse combo also.

The second predicament was one that faces the wider genre in general, and that's the lack of innovation in RTS games. The essential RTS gameplay experience hasn't evolved much in the past decade or so, so this is why we focused on verticality.

And this will make *Stormrise* unique?
The verticality we've been able to

introduce means having more than just flat gameplay environments. By combining our Whip Select control scheme and a third-person camera, we realised we could finally bring real 3D gameplay to an RTS.

We've rooftops that can be accessed by certain units; multi-storey buildings that you fight within; underground tunnels and environments that at times are higher than they're wide.

Players will be able to exploit and defend their surroundings much more strategically. Ideas like fighting for the higher ground and achieving a good line of sight will be more than just a trivial consideration.

There's so much more gameplay potential that is unlocked once you move beyond a 2D battle plane.

What sort of gear will the troops use in their battles?

Playable units in the game range from infantry troops to transformable tanks, huge aircraft, and even mutated beast-like creatures.

There's no question gamers will have variety. The weapons on the Echelon

side are somewhat futuristic versions of what we would consider a conventional armoury, while the Sai employ much more mystical and supernatural abilities, such as mind-control.


How's the multiplayer side of the game shaping up?

Once you're all done and dusted with the single-player campaign mode, it's essential we have a compelling multiplayer experience ready, which will keep you coming back to the game again and again. We're particularly excited about the co-op modes, as well as the Join Anytime functionality.

***Stormrise* deals with environmental issues, like climate change. Why did you go in this direction?**

We started by thinking about how conflict impacts our daily lives, from the devastating effects of Hurricane Katrina to the global war on terror.


So even though *Stormrise* takes place in a fictional setting, the challenges that the characters must overcome run parallel to the issues that we face. This helps keep it relevant.



"It's essential we have a compelling multiplayer, which will keep you coming back again and again"

How has *Stormrise's* development differed to your *Total War* games? Asides from being RTS games, they sound completely different. From a creative standpoint, working on *Stormrise* has been incredibly liberating for us.

The *Total War* franchise is steeped in historic references and factual recreation, so it's a very different experience when you have the opportunity to start from scratch and create the world as you please. **PC**



The robots always stood out in the Country Fayre.



"But Gork just want directions."

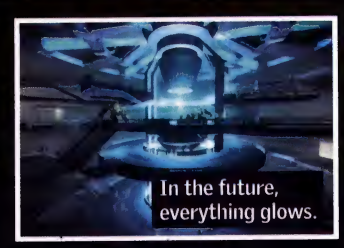
The danger of consolification

The dangers of dumbing down

We all know that the issue of consolification is a hot one at the moment, with numerous high-profile PC games suffering from a willingness to pander to the needs of the armchair controller-wielding menace.

Some games work better on console, some don't. Real-time strategy games are firmly in the latter camp, although there's always room for change. Creative Assembly are attempting to get around the obvious control issues and with Whip Select, they may well succeed. However, in concentrating so much on controls, will they forget that strategy games need to be deep, rewarding in the long term through repeated play, and not necessarily suited to lounging on a sofa, metres away from the screen?

There's bound to be a game out there that ticks all the right boxes, so perhaps *Stormrise* can do this. It will be difficult, though.



In the future, everything glows.

WHAT, NO HOBBITS?

DRAGON AGE: ORIGINS

"Form of... bear!" shouts a hopeful Steve HogartyDEVELOPER BioWare PUBLISHER EA WEBSITE dragonage.bioware.com

NOT ONLY IS Ray Muzyka the co-founder and joint-CEO of BioWare – the world's finest RPG developer – the man also holds an honest-to-god medical degree.

If I'd had a heart attack during our interview, or needed an emergency tracheotomy with a pen, Muzyka MD would've been on hand to save me from the brink of death or stab me with some stationery. On the other hand, if I'd been with some non-qualified numpty, I would've died, probably with biro hastily lodged in all sorts of ineffectual places.

So with my safety assured, I

high fantasy, *Dragon Age* is dark fantasy – somewhere between the low fantasy of George R. R. Martin and the high fantasy of Tolkien. We're trying to pursue the best features of both types of fantasy, a mature gritty fantasy where there are choices that you make as a player, choices that will have consequences. Sometimes a safe choice or a good choice may have a repercussion you're not expecting later on, which I think players will have a lot of fun discovering."

In a scene we'd been shown previously, such choices came to the fore. A quest to rid the forest

you keep will consistently chime in with their opinions on your actions, either tutting in disdain when you stomp a kitten, or cheering in approval as you compliment an old woman on her looks. This time around however, your options aren't as clear-cut and morality is muddy.

"There are a lot of themes that are relevant to any timeframe," claims Muzyka, "the hostility towards the races and the fact that nobody really trusts one another. Your companions, the people who adventure with you, are always judging you on your moment to moment decisions and behaviours. And there are consequences to all of those things you do. It's a timeless theme that I think holds true – it's a real-world vibe that we're putting into the game.

"So it's not as simple as making this choice and it being all butterflies and flowers, it's going to be about making a choice and there being harm to one group while another may benefit. Or maybe the greater good is worth the trade off in the short term. But those are going to be very emotionally impactful on you as a player."

The brief hands-on available didn't give a whole lot of time to become emotionally engaged with the characters – apart from one Legolas-type bloke who really didn't enjoy my penchant for gratuitous violence – but the underlying gameplay is made of solid BioWare stuff. It's a return to *Baldur's Gate*-style adventuring, which means we're steering away from the *Mass Effects* and *KOTORs* of the genre, but it's great fun and surprisingly strategic. And one of the characters can turn into a bear. **PC7**

**"You can have high fantasy elements while still having mature themes, gritty battles and dark consequences"**

started inquiring as to the progress of BioWare's latest roleplayer, *Dragon Age: Origins*. If there's anything about this game that's dampened your squib, it's most likely its seemingly generic fantasy setting, title and characters. So how hard is it for BioWare to avoid retreading that same old fantasy stomping ground?

"It's hard," admits Muzyka, "in fact we chose not to retread as much as possible. Rather than Tolkein-esque

of a race of feral wolf-men leads to an encounter with their leader, and the revelation that you've been tricked by some mages into slaying the remnants of the cursed canine civilisation. What follows is a choice to ally with the wolves or the mages, with the decision you make having huge consequences on the storyline.

"I think in games specifically you see more of the traditional high fantasy," explains Muzyka, "but I think people are going to be excited to see that you can have high fantasy elements while still having mature themes, gritty battles, and choices that have dark consequences. I think players will find that pretty exciting. That's why we're doing *Dragon Age: Origins* in the setting it's in."

And much like other BioWare epics such as *Knights of the Old Republic* and *Baldur's Gate*, the company

THE LOWDOWN

It's from BioWare	✓
Environment-affecting magic	✓
Loads of choice	✓
Dark and gritty	✓
Where's the hook?	✗

THE STORY SO FAR... RAY MUZYKA

BIOWARE
Ray Muzyka MD and
Greg Zeschuk MD
found BioWare.

1995



GAMBLING
Muzyka wins the
inaugural DICE poker
tournament.

2006



SOLD
Muzyka sells BioWare
to EA. Arms are
folded crossly.

2008



EXCITEMENT
Steve talks to Muzyka,
an experience he said
was "arousing".

2009

Orc-what?



ETA
SPRING
2009

There will be consequences

The biggest challenge in creating an RPG, reckons Muzyka...

"It's incredibly difficult to create meaningful consequences in games," admits Ray Muzyka, joint-CEO of BioWare, "simple because of the number of things you have to keep track of, and the permutations to make it feel real to the player. The player remembers what they did, but will the game?"

"One of the things we're trying to do in *Dragon Age* is remember everything the player's done in all cases and make it feel like they're getting the response they expect back. And it's not easy, you have to manage a lot of variables, a lot of things that can be

pretty challenging to make the thread of the story end up still being coherent.

"You still have to have a beginning, middle and end to a story, even if it's non-linear. Even the beginning of *Dragon Age* is a choice because of the different origins, so there are more middles and more endings as well. It's almost like this funnel that gets wider and wider – you have to make every beginning, middle and end feel just as good as the others."



Naked fantasy ladies?
BioWare's been taking
lessons from *The Witcher*.

TAKE ME DOWN...

BURNOUT

Steve Hogarty rolls on down to Paradise City

DEVELOPER Criterion PUBLISHER EA WEBSITE criteriongames.com

THIS IS HOW PC ports should be, not juddering shuddernauts but silky 60fps ninjas. Drag each of *Burnout Paradise's* graphics sliders from their default settings to their enticing right-most extremities and the game will still throw 60 frames at you every second. *Burnout Paradise* is as smooth as a baby's arse, even on normal systems and laptops. This game could run on a calculator. Or on a polystyrene cup wrapped with copper wiring. It will, more or less, work.

This is largely because of Criterion's refreshing attitude to PC development. Instead of delegating the port-job to some lowly work experience lad in the basement, they're throwing themselves headfirst into developing a fantastic, and

carefully-considered PC title. And that's no simple task either: Criterion are relentlessly bolting on new (and free) downloadable content for the console versions, content which has already made its way to PC.

To the business-minded, Criterion must seem insane, and I'm certain a marketing exec somewhere is tearing his hair out over their philanthropic attitude to games development.

STREETS OF FIRE

Burnout Paradise itself is a near-perfect melding of arcade racing, open-worldness and online community features. It still does the stuff the series has been doing forever: reckless, screen-blurring, nitrous-infused speed coupled with detailed, slow-motion, metal-shearing crashes. And the backdrop – the titular Paradise City, along with its sprawling urban arena, scenic suburbs and rural hillsides – is the game's crowning achievement.

Each of the city's 120 junctions hosts an event, be it a straightforward race between two points, a target number of opponents to ram off the road, or any number of other variations on the theme of wrecking and racing. Outside of these events, hidden shortcuts, super jumps, smash-able billboards and secret,



wandering opponents make up the thrust of open-ended content. *Paradise* never leaves you short of things to do, and events are only ever a wheel-spin away.

You'll find you unlock content faster than you can play it, and events faster than you can spin your wheels at them. Even the time it takes for you to race from one end of a street to another is logged and uploaded into a database, so other players can challenge your times.

And the underlying racing itself is substantial, the crashes are spectacular,

while the opponent AI is tenacious. Added to this, a tap on the number pad will bring up a menu offering to drop you seamlessly into Freeburn, the game's multiplayer online arena. The entirety of Paradise City is available to dick about in, and all manner of challenges can be set by the host.

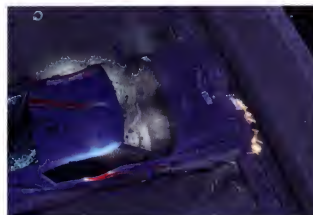
Where the offline events begin to run thin, online challenges pick up the slack. From standard races between two points on the map, to stunt challenges on specific jumps or streets – and it's all

Oh yes! Crashes that'd make even Churchill the dog wince...



CRASH!

Burnout Paradise's crashes are beautiful and incredible slow-motion affairs, with metal compacting and glass shattering in what we assume is a realistic fashion.



BANG!

Cracks will spread across the windscreen like frosty tendrils on an icy morn. Or something. Look at that bonnet crumple though! Cruuump!



WALLOP!

Some car crashes you can drive away from, as long as you've got all of your wheels and aren't too badly damaged. You won't drive away from this one...

THE LOWDOWN	
Huge open city	✓
Tonnes of content	✓
Constantly improving	✓
Slick as hell	✓
We miss Crash mode	✗

THE STORY SO FAR... THE BURNOUT SERIES

BURNOUT

The first *Burnout* arrives, and reigns supreme until...

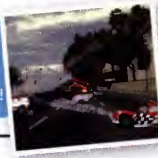
2001



BURNOUT 2

Point of Impact adds Crash mode, letting you cause big pile-ups!

2002



BURNOUT 3

Takedown's Road Rage focuses on taking down opponents.

2004



BURNOUT PARADISE

The first *Burnout* to appear on PC, and hopefully not the last.

2009

PARADISE

ETA
OUT
NOW

readily accessible, just two clicks away with no loading or jarring relocation. It works so seamlessly at any time, through a perfunctory on-screen menu which doesn't pause or disrupt the action in any way, that as a self-congratulatory online platform we should be ashamed not to have thought of it first.

Drawbacks are hard to come by in a game this refined. *Burnout Paradise* never over-extends itself or tries to do

something it can't quite manage – it sticks rigidly to its premise, its racing and crashing roots and its sturdy online backbone. Criterion have crafted a beautiful arcade racer in a massive and genuinely interesting open world, and with an ongoing attitude so motherly and nurturing we're guaranteed a drip feed of new content throughout the year.

Racers are rarely this slick.

BONUS TREATMENT

Already they've released three updates. *Bogart* was a significant patch, while *Cagney* introduced three new game modes to Freeburn, and the *Bikes* pack brought in day and night cycles for the city, as well as dynamic weather and, of course, motorbikes. You'll find all of this stuff available from the get go with the PC version – not only that, but the entire game will be free to download on a trial basis – a massive, time-restricted demo of the full thing. So you've no reason to at least try it.

And it runs like the clappers. **PCZ**



WHAT A VIDEO (GAME)!

Shattered glass will continue flying forward at the speed you were going before you hit the wall – thankfully there are no pedestrians to be impaled.



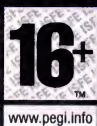
Bikes are new to the series, and they accelerate like cheetahs.

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PCZONE PRESENTS THE TOP 10 SHOOTERS OF 2009

WHAT'S IN STORE for 2009? Scooping cold baked beans out of a tin can with two fingers because you lost your job and your bank has switched to a crude bartering system? A new strain of bird flu wiping out half the population? Well, yeah. But don't let the grim arse-end of the noughties drag you down: you've got some spectacularly violent games to tide you over during these dark days.

So here's our list of the 10 best shooters you'll be playing this year. The industry's done well to create a varied and interesting portfolio of titles that focus on shooting things to make them dead. Just look at *Singularity*, which actually lets you rapidly age a man into an early grave, and *Operation Flashpoint 2*, which promises to accurately represent the sorts of physics involved when a person's brain is exploded by an armour piercing round. Valve's a notable absentee as long as their upcoming titles remain mostly speculative, but rest assured they'll have something nice to show us in the coming months.

Board up the windows, scatter coins around your home to keep the baying mobs occupied, and settle down for the most exciting economic downturn you'll ever have.



These soldiers will be no match for the power of your TIME-GLOVE!

ETA
WINTER
2009

01

ALL THE TIME IN THE WORLD...

SINGULARITY

Steve Hogarty does the timewarp again

DEVELOPER Raven PUBLISHER Activision WEBSITE activision.com

THIS IS THE most amazing shooter you'll play in 2009. It's unlikely to be the best, if we're being brutally honest, but it is, in a very literal sense, absolutely amazing.

Singularity is the story of a man who finds a time-glove, which fires pure time out of the fingertips. Using this time-glove (which is really called a "Time Manipulation Device"), your character – Nate Renko – can grab objects and move them about in the world, a trick known as Chronostasis. He can also move objects through time – for instance, grabbing a barrel and reverting it to how it existed in 1950 (shiny, new and explosive), or projecting a person into their future, turning them into screaming, writhing skeletons.

There's more. Nate has a mysterious friend who exists outside time, in a place called Timegatory, which is like purgatory except with time. This stranded scientist offers

clues and help, though his intentions are worryingly ambiguous. We're not finished. Nate can use his Chronolight to highlight Chrono-objects, items in the world which have been covered in Element 99 – a secret weapon developed by the Russians during the Cold War, but we'll get back to that later. Occasionally something called a Timewave will erupt from a nearby location, and throw you and everything else back to 1950.

Sometimes you'll use time grenades to create Deadlocks, bubbles of solid time in which things appear frozen. You can use these on enemies to completely immobilise and avoid them. Finally, Nate will often encounter Time Rifts. These are holes in space-time (portals, if you will) which allow you to look through and walk freely between 2010 and 1950.

Did you get all that? It's very important you understand the terminology before we continue.

And don't forget, there are also Time Ticks, evil insects that live outside of normal time. Write that down in your copybook now.

"Sometime before WWII," explains Jon Zuk, creative director at Raven, somehow with a straight face, "Element 99 was discovered on the island of Katonga-12, a small insignificant island off the eastern coast of the Soviet Union.

"E-99 was found to have unique properties in that by using it as a fuel, much like coal or wood, it released a 10-fold amount of power. But you don't get something for nothing in this world and when scientists in 1950 did a large scale test of E-99, there was an accident."

The game begins in 2010, with Nate Renko, a US Air Force recon pilot, being flown to Katonga-12 to investigate strange readings from the island. You crash and after waking soon

THE LOWDOWN

Timegatory	✓
Time Rifts	✓
Time Waves	✓
Time Manipulation Device	✓
Chronolight	✗

THE TOP 10 SHOOTERS OF 2009

"Is this all bit tongue-in-cheek? Surprisingly not – Raven are deathly serious about their time travelling wongergame"



Speak to the hand.

discover the Time Manipulation Device, the game's wacky box of chrono-trickery. Your surroundings – the derelict, decaying concrete research facilities, dark storage bunkers and military compounds – are weathered by the passage of time. Raven drew inspiration from an abandoned munitions base close to

their studio. It didn't have as cool a name as Katorga-12 though, it must be said.

"Badger Ammunition Plant was a real working ammo plant from WWII until the '90s," Jon Zuk smiles, "after which it was decommissioned. When it was abandoned, and before they started demolition, it was this really

large and interesting ghost town that made us wonder what stories those walls could tell. What if you could wander around in there and see into the past. Sadly, we were never allowed to go inside as it was too dangerous. A lot of the buildings were wood that had become laced with gunpowder and other explosives."

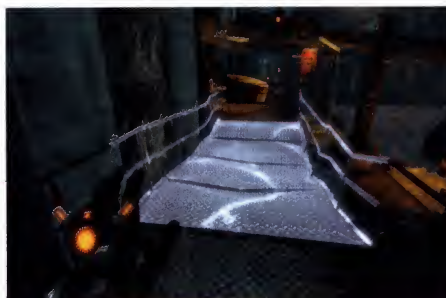
The time-glove bestows Nate with some interesting powers. The TMD can project items dusted in E-99 into a future state, or revert them to a previous state. For example, as enemies rush across a bridge to attack you, the glove can be used to propel the bridge through time, across hundreds of years in a matter of

If only I could turn back time Oh wait I can...



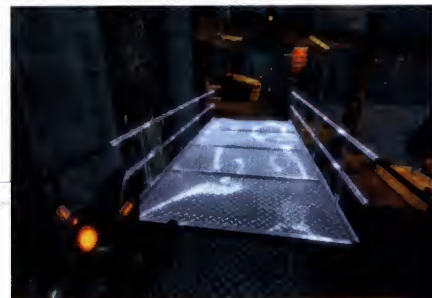
BROKEBACK BRIDGE

Gah, look at the state of this bridge. It's completely bent out of shape, you'll never catch me walking across such an out-of-shape bridge.



JEFF BRIDGES

Aha, but if I rewind this bit of bridge through time itself I can restore it to its original form, and thus walk across it in complete safety. Time-glove powers, activate!



BRIDGET JONES'S DIARY

Don't rewind it too far though, otherwise it'll turn to nuts and bolts, then to ore, molten rock, and eventually the hydrogen core of a star. Maybe.

THE STORY SO FAR... RAVEN



BLACK CRYPT
Black Crypt was a colourful version of Dungeon Master.

1992



STAR WARS
Jedi Outcast is released, and is the best Star Wars ever.

2002



QUAKE 4
The fourth Quake game! Why haven't you played it yet?

2005

WOLFENSTEIN
Raven start work the new Wolfenstein, and add aliens to it.

2008

seconds. The effect? Well, the bridge decays under their feet and they fall to their doom.

The effect will work the other way too, spot a bridge that needs fixing and you can rewind it through time to a point where it was in perfect working order. Revert a rusted old barrel to its original state and you've got a shiny, exploding red barrel. You can even rapidly age enemies if you're quick enough.

TIME SOUP

"Our ageing effect was inspired by *Blade*," laughs Jon Zuk, "from when vampires are destroyed. They appear to turn mortal and instantly age as if the years are catching up with them. We don't let you turn soldiers into babies though. We thought that crossed a line. However, we do let you send soldiers back in time. Because E-99 is unstable, the resultant entity is no longer a soldier... but definitely not a baby!"

Some sort of terrifying corporeal manifestation of pre-birth, then? Jon Zuk won't tell us – though we have seen the twitching corpses of mutants dotted about Katorga-12. Probably best stick to ageing your enemies into charred skeletons instead.

You're often ceremoniously dragged back through time to 1950 by a Timewave emanating from the centre of the island, a phenomenon which leaves you standing in exactly the same place but 60 years previous. The 1950 version of Katorga-12 is a fully functioning research station run by some hostile Soviets, and it's your actions in this timeframe which effect changes in 2010. The past looks suitably desaturated and is far cleaner than the dank future, while remaining similar enough to allow you to identify the same locations in both time periods. Your back and forth jaunts through these two points in time form the meat of *Singularity's* puzzles – and as any aspiring physicist knows, time travel is confusing as hell.

"We've painted ourselves into the corner a few times by coming up with a set of rules and then realising we can't break those rules," admits Jon Zuk, rubbing his head. "For instance, say you need a fuse to power a door. If you go to that door in 1950, should there be a fuse there? If there is and you take it, is that why the fuse was missing in the present? Another one is a broken catwalk you come across. You rewind it to a brand-new state and continue. Later, you see the catwalk



Interior decor by Nikola Tesla.



Altogether now: "Let's do the time warp again!"

get destroyed by something. So did you arrive at the catwalk before or after? A lot to think about, huh?"

TIME GIRAFFE

At certain points in *Singularity*, your Time Manipulation Device can be used to resurrect massive objects from the past. In one sequence Nate coaxes a rusted sunken freighter from the bottom of a harbour – the ship rises from the water, the cracked hull miraculously mends itself, the rust seems to melt away like frost, and beams, cables and cabins crawl back into their original positions until the freighter is once again floating in the dock. Inside lies your objective and, oddly enough, it seems that very large objects can only retain their future-state for short periods of time.

This means that as you fight your way through the hull of the ship, defending yourself from Russian agents bent on protecting the island from prying American eyes, the entire structure slowly corrodes around you. As the boat lists, you find yourself

having to re-futurise individual doors just to make your way to the objective. It's an impressive transformation in a short space of time.

"The *Unreal 3* engine allows us to pull a lot of cool tricks with streaming in levels and manipulating materials," explains Jon Zuk. "We take the rusted hulk of the freighter, animate it back to a new state when you manipulate it, and then we load the interior as basically a new level."

Other tricks up *Singularity's* sleeve include the Time Rifts, an effect strikingly similar to *Prey's* portals, except here you're looking through (and seamlessly travelling through) time rather than space, from desolate and ruined surrounding to glorious and well-maintained rooms.

Is this all bit tongue-in-cheek? Surprisingly not – Raven are deathly serious about their time travelling wondergame. If they can keep up the pace of insane ideas, expand the glove's uses beyond repairing and wrecking objects, and not allow themselves to fall back on

Paying homage

To ideas other people had first...

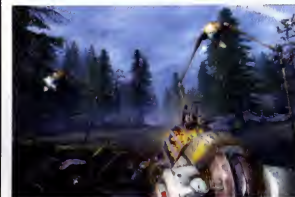


PREY

IDEA: Portals

WHEN: Almost three years ago

Time Rifts are the same size and shape as *Prey's* portals, and allow you to walk through them in the same way. But Time Rifts are holes in time.



HALF-LIFE 2

IDEA: Grabbity guns

WHEN: Over four years ago

A version of *Half-Life 2's* grabbity gun shows up in the form of Chronostasis, which lets you pick things up and blast them about.



SYSTEM SHOCK 2

IDEA: Ghosts of the past

WHEN: Nine and a half years ago

Time Echoes are manifestations of souls trapped in time. They often lead you to clues and important locations. Just like *System Shock 2's* spooks.



UNREAL 3

IDEA: Areas of frozen time

WHEN: Over one year ago

Unreal 3 had that device which set up a huge cube of slow-time. In it bullets and enemies slowed to a crawl. *Singularity's* Deadlock grenades do this too.

the game's unremarkable shooter roots, *Singularity* will be the most interesting FPS of the year. As it stands it's an parcel of bizarre ideas, which may or may not work. **PC4**

THE TOP 10 SHOOTERS OF 2009

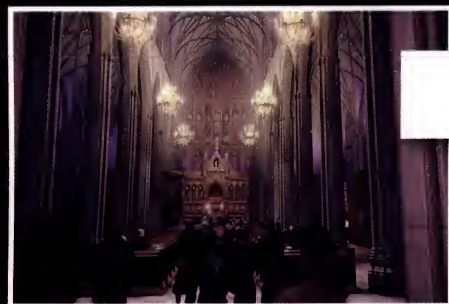
THE WISEGUYS RETURN...

MAFIA II

02

2K Czech talk us through their new trailer, scene by scene

DEVELOPER 2K Czech PUBLISHER 2K Games WEBSITE mafia2game.com ETA Winter 2009



1. THE CATHEDRAL

Created specifically for this trailer, 2K Czech still aren't ready to say whether or not this cathedral will appear in the final game. But they have confirmed that a church will feature at some point during the game. "Two of the main things that unite all people," explains Jack Scalici, director of production at 2K Czech, "no matter what culture you come from, are family and religion. So I borrowed a bit from my own past and set the trailer in a church, with Vito going to confession at the behest of his mother."



2. THE DETECTIVE

A confessional montage of madcap mafia mayhem follows, featuring this detective chap who harbours a personal grudge against protagonist Vito. "When I think of the '50s," explains Scalici, "the one thing that stands out in my mind is the birth of rock 'n' roll. And when you go back and listen to the early stuff, one artist in particular stands out when you're looking for a piece of music that really rocks: Little Richard. We tried a couple of different tracks, and *Long Tall Sally* ended up working the best. That's the one we went with."



3. THE BEST MATE

Described by Scalici as, "quite possibly the greatest videogame character ever created", Joe Barbaro is Vito's best friend. Wisecracking Joe's the first character you meet, and he's the guy who drags you back into the seedy mobster world. "He was an absolute blast to write dialogue for," laughs Scalici. "His hobbies include booze, hookers, and violence."



4. THE CARS

The '50s spelt a boom for the American car industry – meaning we won't be stuck with the rickety old boxes of the original *Mafia*. Instead we'll have faster motors, more skids, and better crashes. "We have so many cool cars in *Mafia II*," beams Scalici, "and we're toying with the idea of allowing the player to race them against other drivers. Maybe for money, maybe for pink slips, we'll see. This was a popular activity among the youth in America in the '50s and it's something we're really interested in including."

5. THE CITY

Empire City looks incredible, and this trailer is 100% in-engine work. The cars, the pedestrians and the lighting conspire to create one of the most living and believable city scenes in games. "When the city was being designed, that was the main goal. Every part of the city has to feel alive, lived-in, and be just plain believable. As you can see in the screen shots, our art team really hit this one out of the park."



03



When shoulder pads go nuclear.

WOLFENSTEIN

DEVELOPER Raven PUBLISHER Activision
WEBSITE wolfenstein.com ETA Spring

WOLFENSTEIN WAS NEVER about realism. *Return to Castle Wolfenstein* showed up around the time *Medal of Honor* was busy honing its scripted sequence skills, and fulfilled its brief of looking good and playing even better.

But the occult slant that emerged at about the halfway point marked the game's lowpoint, so for Raven to take the bizarreness one step further in the new *Wolfenstein* is a bold move. While historical groups such as the Kreisau Circle appear, they in fact appear as

paramilitary resistance fighters. And while Nazis show up, so does an alternate dimension which you can leap to at any time, and from which you can draw time-slowing powers. And in that dimension, there are alien creatures that explode pan-dimensionally.

Still, *Wolfenstein 3D* had a robotic Hitler armed with quad Gatling guns, undead Nazi zombies, and mutants with three arms, and that effectively birthed the FPS genre – so look forward to this, yeah?

05



I know an old lady who swallowed one of those.

RAGE

DEVELOPER id PUBLISHER EA
WEBSITE idsoftware.com ETA Winter

JOHN CARMACK, OWNER of the comfiest chair at id Software, recently announced that an uncompressed build of *Rage* would clock in at something in the region of one terabyte. That's over 1,000 gigabytes. That's 500 times bigger than *Doom 3*. In fact, *Rage* would fill 728,178 floppy disks – the universal measure of anything computer related.

"Rage would fill 728,178 floppy disks, the universal measure of anything"

The post-apocalyptic next-gen shooter is still a closely guarded secret, but we know it combines *Burnout*-style off-road racing with an open-world first-person shooter epic. But with the esteemed id at the helm and their incredible-looking Tech 5 engine powering the game, the chance of *Rage* not being in the top 10 shooters of 2009 is so miniscule as to make it hardly worth drawing attention to. Have you all seen the screenshot of the fly?

04



We want one.

BIOSHOCK 2: SEA OF DREAMS

DEVELOPER 2K Marin PUBLISHER 2K Games
WEBSITE 2kgames.com ETA Winter

WE'RE SLIGHTLY WARY that the sequel to the classic shooter *BioShock* isn't being developed by the team behind the original. That responsibility falls on the shoulders of 2K Marin, the folks who ported *BioShock* to the PlayStation 3. But you'd have to be an idiot to think that *BioShock 2* won't make a huge splash this year though.

The teaser trailer shows an older Little Sister standing on a beach, grasping a cuddly Big Daddy

as the camera pans back to show Rapture-like towers rising from the sand. Are there clues to be gleaned in the mystically formed cityscape? Does the barnacle encrusted logo belie some great mystery? Well, other than the suggestion that the game will take place after the events of the original, there's not much to go on.

We're still a bit sore that they revealed *BioShock 2* on the PlayStation 3 too, the swines.

06



Making genocide fun again.

BATTLEFIELD HEROES

DEVELOPER EA PUBLISHER EA
WEBSITE battlefieldheroes.com ETA Spring

SLIPPITY SLIP SLIP for EA's wonderfully animated browser-based online shooter. We were supposed to be blasting primary coloured Germans out of the sky before Christmas, but here we are still waiting for the open beta. Rumour has it that EA are waiting for a more opportune time to release *Battlefield Heroes*, perhaps as part of a larger online gaming portal – but all that aside, the game remains incredible looking.

Free to play as long as you allow your brain to absorb some delicious advertising, *Battlefield Heroes* pits Axis against Allies in decidedly *Team Fortress 2*-like surroundings. It's basic: capturing the flag, scooting about in tanks and planes or loitering around some control points, and it promises to be simple to pick up and play.

Whether that's a good or a bad thing remains to be seen, but DICE can't do much wrong by us.

THE TOP
10 SHOOTERS OF
2009
GET FILTHIER...



OPERATION FLASHPOINT 2: DRAGON RISING

Like a slice of lemon wrapped around a gold brick...

DEVELOPER Codemasters PUBLISHER Codemasters WEBSITE codemasters.com/flashpoint2 ETS Winter

WHEN RAMBO CHUCKS a grenade, the resulting explosion launches about seven people through the air in great arcs of blood and errant limbs. While we clap and cheer in appreciation, Lee Brimmicombe-Wood, chief games designer at Codemasters sits and shakes his head. What follows is a direct quote: "When reality strikes like a gold brick wrapped in a slice of lemon," laughs BW while deftly referencing Douglas Adams, "grenades aren't that deadly."

The mega-realistic modern warfare simulator promises to accurately show that grenades generally don't kill, but are instead intended to maim as many people as possible, leaving the enemy with a whole bunch of cumbersome casualties to take care of. Though if BW wants to try tell that to Stallone, that's his choice.

"With *Operation Flashpoint 2* we've really thrown our efforts into the under-the-hood combat modelling," explains BW, "the ballistics, ammunition performance, trajectories, weapon modelling, armour characteristics. This should lead to an experience different from what you might find in other standard shooters where they cut these corners. Our tanks don't have health bars to wear down. Either a round penetrates their armour or it doesn't, and we assess the combat results accordingly based on the type of munitions being used.

Shells not only cause blast damage to targets nearby, but will also project fragments at targets further away based on 'real world' physics. Body armour might stop a hit on your torso but a bullet or a piece of shrapnel in a limb will fell you."

So realism is the word of the day, everyday, on the *OpFlash 2* team. And it's a word they're trumpeting at every turn for a long while now. Whether or not the game ends up being any fun to play is another matter – especially considering nobody on the planet's played the bloody thing yet. Come on Codies, let us at it.



Remember guys,
act realistic.



"Sarge, rock
spotted ahead!"

QUAKE LIVE

Bring your browser to life

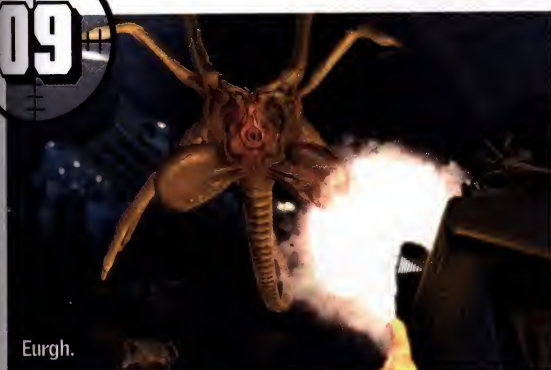
DEVELOPER id PUBLISHER id WEBSITE quakelive.com ETA Soon

IMPRESSED AS we were with *Off-road Velociraptor Safari* running in our browser window, it wasn't until we laid eyes on *Quake Live* that we were convinced in-browser gaming is going to be a massive deal in 2009.

The second free-to-play, advertising-powered shooter in our list, id's online loveliness is a throwback to the glory days of the damn-near perfect *Quake III*. Bolstered by an intensive matchmaking and skill-matching system (which is still a bit broken, given that every game we join nearly always features a ridiculously talented bastard), and persistent stats, tables and scoreboards, *Quake Live* is neat, professionally packaged, uniquely exciting and unavoidably excellent. And that's when it's in beta!



09



ALIENS: COLONIAL MARINES

DEVELOPER SEGA PUBLISHER SEGA
WEBSITE sega.com/aliens ETA Winter

SHOOTERS WITHOUT ON-SCREEN ammo readouts and maps and other HUD junk are in fashion. Everybody thinks they invented it first as a means of drawing the player into the game – even your mum.

Aliens: Colonial Marines – SEGA's squad-based, QTE-ridden horror-shooter – will be on this bandwagon. This'll force you to look right into your motion sensor, and more crucially, to

look away from nearby vents, doors and rapidly approaching xenomorphs.

Set after the events of *Alien3*, and scripted by *Battlestar Galactica* writers Bradley Thompson and David Weddle, *Colonial Marines* promises to be most pants-dampening *Alien* game to date, guaranteeing to genuinely panic you when your squad is massacred by a pack of marauding alien drones.

10



CALL OF DUTY: MODERN WARFARE 2

DEVELOPER Infinity Ward PUBLISHER Activision
WEBSITE callofduty.com ETA Winter

INFINITY WARD ARE back at the helm of the *Call of Duty* series to bring us the sixth *COD* game in almost as many years, setting the new shooter firmly back in midst of current military conflicts.

This'll come as a relief to anybody who caught wind of a recent rumour suggesting the next in the series would in fact be set in a science-fiction future – perhaps lessons have

been learned from EA's less than successful *Battlefield 2142*.

Not much else is known about Infinity Ward's opus. Actually nothing is known, as Infinity Ward are even refusing to confirm *Modern Warfare 2*'s being made, even though we know it is. But *Modern Warfare* was a great game in both single and multiplayer, so this one should be high on your Give-a-Shit-o-meter. **PCZ**

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(and news, previews, reviews, features, videos, screens etc)



PCZONE REVIEWS

Our verdict on the latest PC games

Wings take dream

D AMN THIS RECESSION. Would you believe that our famed torrent of games clothing has slowed to a trickle? Used to be a time when you couldn't move from one side of the office to the other without having to wade through *Far Cry 2* shirts, *Crysis* hoodies and *Silent Hunter III* blouses. This month I met with Grin, the guys behind two big movie tie-ins: *Terminator Salvation* and *Wanted: Weapons of Fate*. The best tie-in garment their budgets could stretch to were Grin socks.

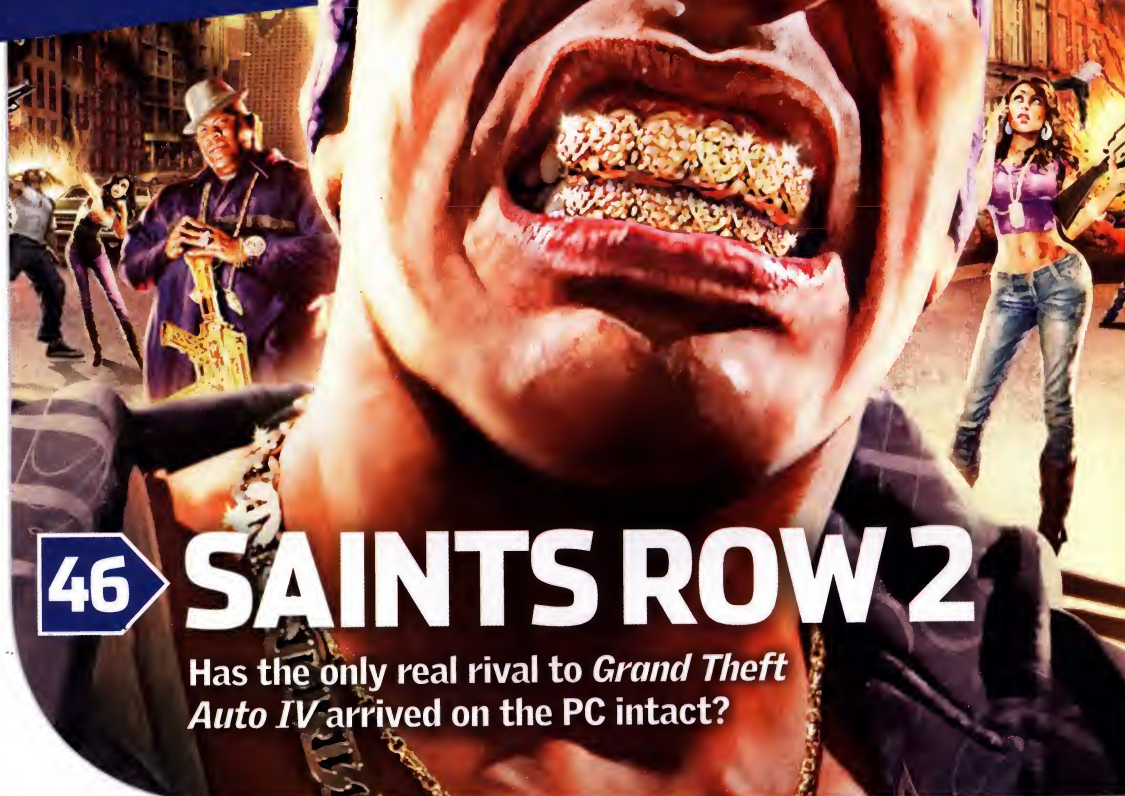
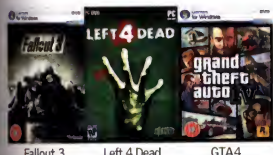
The economic downturn's had a few other effects too, the most upsetting is Microsoft's decision to close ACES studio, the guys behind the fantastic (and long running, at 27 years) *Flight Simulator* series. All I can hope is that it wasn't a decision that was taken lightly, and that once the bleak times come to an end there'll be a revival of what is easily one of PC gaming's finest staples. They also did *Train Simulator*, so don't be too upset.

Steve Hogarty

Steve Hogarty,
Deputy editor

Must Buys!

PC ZONE Classics are hard to come by, and when you see one you should drop to the floor and refuse to move until someone buys you the game...



46 SAINTS ROW 2

Has the only real rival to *Grand Theft Auto IV* arrived on the PC intact?

The PC ZONE Awards



CLASSIC (90%+)
Games scoring in this bracket are air-punching, heart-soaring triumphs. Buy them.



RECOMMENDED (75-89%)
Head-turning, if not eye-popping, games. But then, who wants their eyes popped?



DUMP (0-19%)
PC ZONE's dirty protest. If a game is bad, we won't shirk our duty.

AND THE REST



ONLINE ONLY
Don't have an internet connection? Then you're wasting your time. Move along please.



EXPANSION PACK
See this and you're going to have to own the original to play the expansion. We know - life's not fair.



ON THE DVD
Good news! Check out the cover DVD for a playable demo or movie.

The PC ZONE gaming machine

As you'll see on the many pages of resplendent reviews that follow, we list the minimum specifications you need to play each game in each review. Please refer to the publisher's website to check out their recommended optimum specs that'll make the games super-whizzy. We review all new games on a variety of systems, including our top-spec, very desirable Xworks X81-C2D, (pictured right). For more info on Xworks, tap into the wonder that is the internet and type the following selection of letters into your browser: xworksinteractive.com.



ALSO REVIEWED

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It promises to be more fun than *GTA4*, but is it really?
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What went wrong with this Tolkien-em-up?
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Will the Tyranids make this RTS as good as the original?
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PCZONE SWEARS...

- To only review code signed off by the publishers and the developers
- To give you our honest opinion. We're gamers. We love games. And we hate bad ones. Just like you
- To tell you if a company refuses to send a game to us before it's on sale. There's always a reason
- To hang up on companies who say that 79% isn't a good score. What do they know?
- To listen to you if you think we've got something wrong. Email us at letters@pczone.co.uk

Remember, if you're not slapping a policeman, you're not having fun.



SAINTS ROW 2

Stilwater's a jungle... *Ed Zitron* wonders how to keep from going under

DEVELOPER Volition
PUBLISHER THQ
WEBSITE saintsrow.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £34.99

AT A GLANCE...

GTA-clone that errs on the side of fun over realism by loading itself with side-missions, out-of-control physics and witty dialogue.

Minimum system requirements:
2GHz dual core processor, 1GB RAM, and a 128MB video card.

HOW IT STACKS

GRAND THEFT AUTO
SAN ANDREAS **92%**

GRAND THEFT AUTO IV **91%**

SAINTS ROW 2 **67%**

WHEN GOING to a job interview, you want to look your best. At the very least you'll wash, wear a decent suit, put a brush through your hair, and answer questions with a degree of honesty. If this review were an interview, *Saints Row 2* is the misunderstood genius that turned up in ripped, stained jeans, a hoodie with "arses" written on it, and stinking of piss. In other words, no matter how much brilliance is hiding behind it, the presentation is so off-putting it's impossible to ignore. THQ and Volition should, frankly, be ashamed of themselves. They've covered up a great game with lazy interfaces, a shocking amount of bugs, a lack of understanding of PC users, gaming, and seemed to have even failed to carry out basic testing.

Volition admitted before launch that *Saints Row 2* would not be bug-free – but, unbelievably, they've managed to

create brand-new bugs, during the porting process. These range from the annoying (texture pop-in and tearing) to the frustrating (textures disappearing below you) to the shocking (warping outside of cars at random and crashes that wipe out save games). If they're not bringing your experience to a screeching halt, they're casually yanking at your trousers to divert your attention from a well-written and voice-acted story and gameplay that elates far more regularly than *GTA4*.

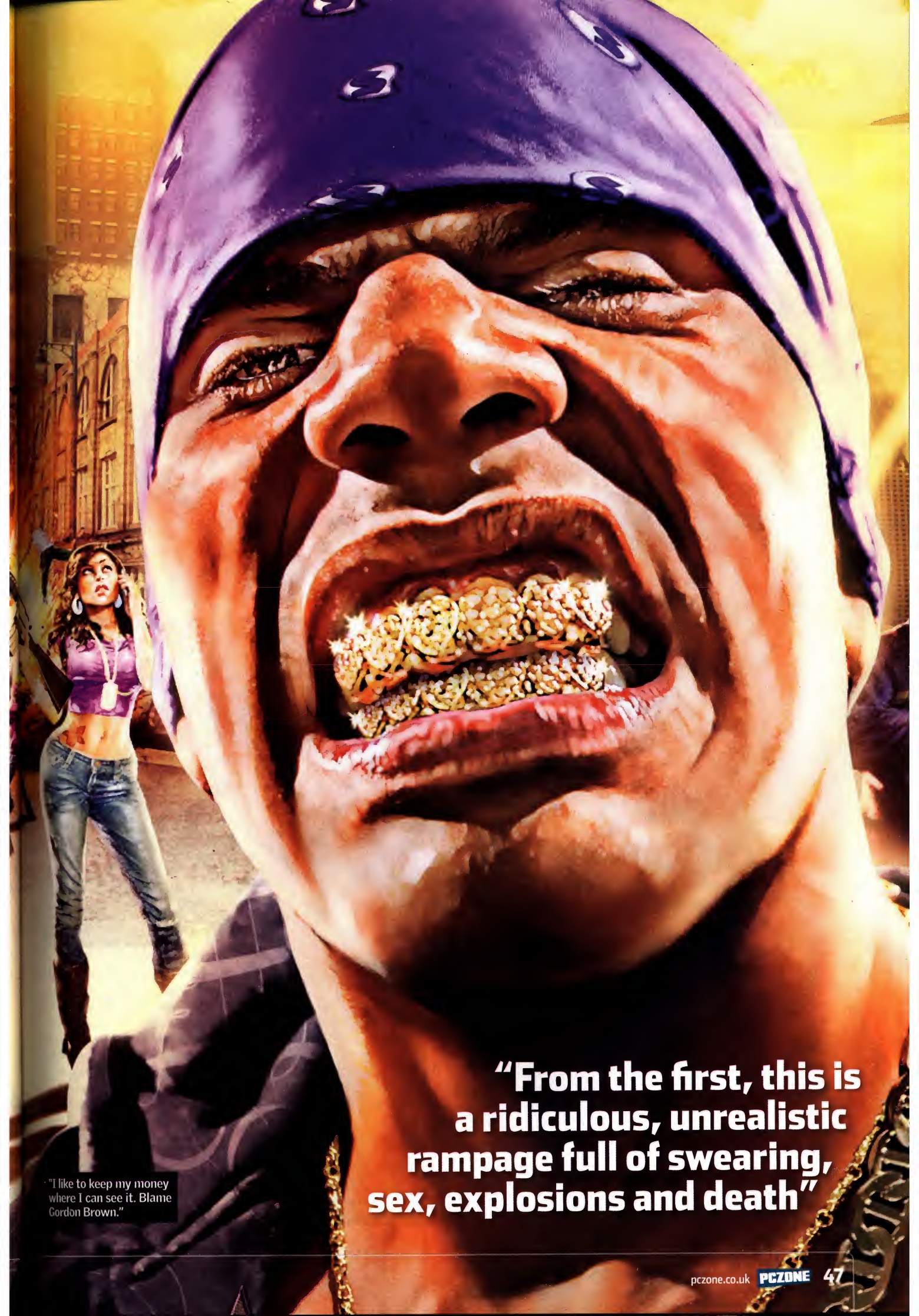
PRISON BREAK

The game begins around two years after the original, with our hero or heroine waking up in the infirmary of the State Prison, with the bandages just about to be removed – easily switching into a remarkably flexible character editor (see 'Private Protagonist', overleaf). This is where the first frustrations of trying to use a keyboard and mouse arise, as you

attempt to navigate menus that are slow, clunky and awkwardly translated between an Xbox 360 controller and the keyboard. The top options are navigated by pressing CTRL and Shift, but separate parts of the interface require the arrow keys. However, unlike *Mercenaries 2*, *Dead Space* and other console ports, when you give up and plug in a 360 controller, you'll find that none of the buttons onscreen change – thus you'll spend time prodding buttons in an attempt to see which correspond to what command.

Once you manage to push past some of these problems – which, sadly, is never 100% possible – you'll find *Saints Row 2* to be a remarkably deep game. While on the surface it's very much a lo-fi *GTA4*, it quickly blossoms into its rougher brother: a mishmash of *Miami Vice*, *The Wire* and *Starsky & Hutch*. The story follows the Saints as they take Stilwater back from the Sons of





**"From the first, this is
a ridiculous, unrealistic
rampage full of swearing,
sex, explosions and death"**

"I like to keep my money
where I can see it. Blame
Gordon Brown."



Unlimited grenades allow you to blow up 'copters with ease.



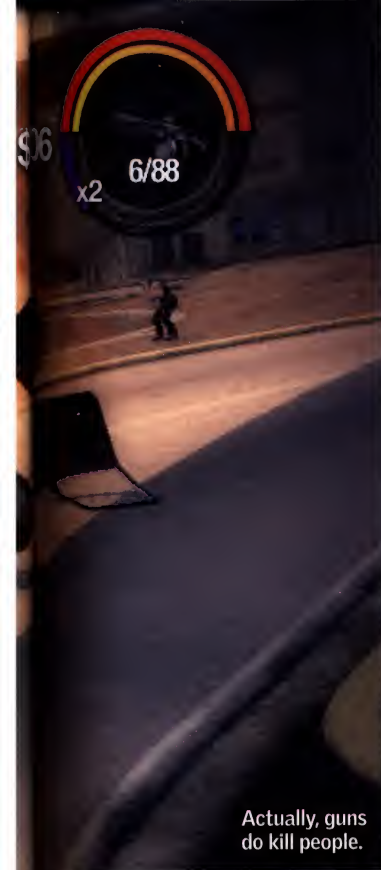
moves the spraycan and sprays paint

Marking your territory with a tag gets you extra respect.

"So I ate a lot over Christmas. Want to make something of it?"

Samedi, The Ronin and The Brotherhood, as well as the shadowy Ultor Corporation. It's constantly sassy, crude and unbelievably violent, but never feels forced. From the first few minutes of the game, the tone is set that this is a ridiculous, unrealistic rampage full of swearing, sex, explosions and death. That's what makes the whole of Stilwater so loveable.

While *GTA4*'s sarcastic commercials and mild humour felt a little overdone in the world of Liberty City, *Stilwater* and *Saints Row 2* embrace nonsense wholesale. You'll bring down the average cost of living in an area by spraying it



Actually, guns do kill people.

I'll be your private protagonist

Customising your criminal has never been so, um, intimate



Saints Row 2 has one of the most customisable main characters in history. You can make your player as normal or freakish as you'd like, with control over the smallest details, such as the space between the eyes, the poutiness of the lips – or even by giving them a bust. As you can see (left), you can create a man with breasts, add make-up, and even dress him in women's clothing.

If you want a normal character, though, it's quite possible to recreate yourself. A nice touch is that the voice choices include a British option, and each one voices the entire storyline – rather impressive considering how much dialogue there is. The only annoyance is that none of the menus are mouse-driven, so you have to fudge your way through with the confusing mistake that is the keyboard-interface. Thanks, Volition.



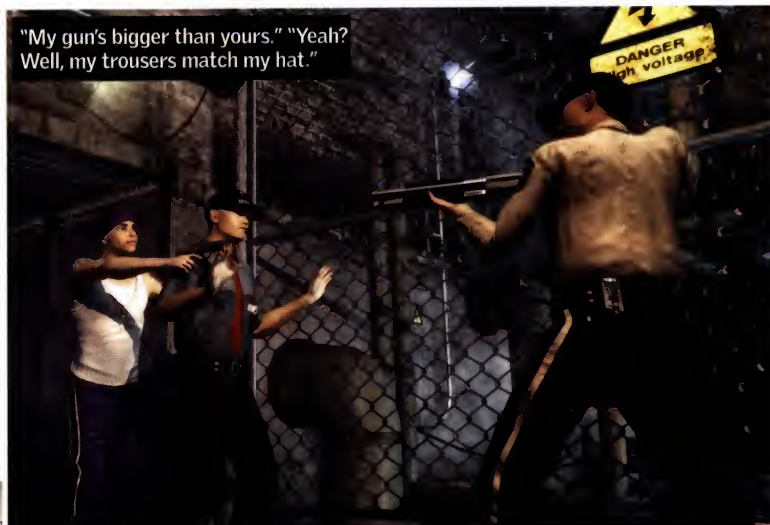
with shit, tear around the city on a motorbike knocking cars aside before shooting a load of sword-carrying thugs, and you'll protect celebrities by throwing their fans off buildings. It's a thoroughly bizarre world, and one you can't help but enjoy once you're in the thick of it.

Control-wise, when you're not navigating menus, you'll find the game works reasonably well on a keyboard and mouse. It's significantly easier to gun down enemies both on foot and from a car using the familiar WASD/mouse combination than our 360 brethren have had it. Volition succeeded in making the game much more fluid than *GTA4*, with weapons having a satisfying power, and cars having the weight, speed, and ability to turn on a sixpence that you'd expect from a game that wants you tearing around corners with liberal application of

"I loaded a car with C4, pissed off as many cops as possible, then charged them before exploding eight cop cars"



the hand brake. Notably, they've ignored the third-person shooter genre's appropriation of *Gears of War*'s cover system, which is incredibly jarring if you're coming to this game from *GTA4*. This doesn't horribly affect combat, as it's much more action-packed and hyperbolic, but you may find yourself trying to press up against a wall more



times than you'd like in the heat of a gunfight.

In general, *Saints Row 2* is like a Dalí painting of *GTA4*. So much of the latter was spent driving around, taking in the experience, while most of *Saints*

Row 2 is spent creating your own bizarre adventures. For example, while playing the slightly tweaked Mayhem mode, you're armed with unlimited amounts of grenades and shotgun ammo. You get bonuses for blowing up particular vehicles, fences, park benches... anything that combusts – and the engine allows for a ridiculous amount of destruction onscreen. In one Mayhem extravaganza, I loaded a car with C4, pissed off as many cops as possible, and then charged them before bailing out and exploding eight cop cars.

It's the hundreds of little hilarious moments like these that make *Saints Row 2* enjoyable – and Volition have really succeeded in capitalising on the destructive, manic urges of a generation of people who bought city sandbox games purely to hurt their fellow man.

But it's by that same token that *Saints Row 2* on the PC frustrates to the point of unbelievable anger. On a relatively pricey PC, the game rarely jumped above 15 frames-per-second at the highest settings. Dropping them down to medium made the game look a bit shit. This is a game that doesn't look anywhere near as slick, cool or dramatic as *Assassin's Creed*, *GTA4*, or even *Brothers In Arms*, and it's utterly inexcusable how badly it runs at times. Whether it's unoptimised, fixable with a patch, or just flat-out badly coded I can't say, but it isn't fair on anyone to ship games in a

"These problems have been created by porting it to PC – and it's not fair on you"

That's probably someone's mate you just shot.

\$4,317

50/∞
x2

★ ★ ★ GANG KILL
★ ★ HEAD SHOT

The armoury

A few of the pea-shooters you'll be wielding

ANNIHILATOR

Propel a grenade with a rocket using this nifty launcher. A staple of any crime sim, *Saints Row 2*'s effort doesn't disappoint.

FLAME-THROWER

While *GTA4* thinks itself above such frivolities, *Saints Row 2* lets you burninate civilians and their rides.

CHAINSAW

"*GTA* already did it" is the "*The Simpsons* already did it" of the open-world shooter. Chainsaws aren't new, but they're still fun.

ASI4 HAMMER

This fully-automatic shotgun is useful if you're not concerned with accuracy or sanctity of life.

SATCHEL CHARGE

A neat little pack of C4 which can be remotely detonated at a time of your choosing. Lets you set elaborate traps.

SKR-9 THREAT

The Uzi can be dual-wielded, but you still can't shoot in two directions while jumping through the air – boo.

MINIGUN

Yeah, the weapon names may get less interesting, but the firepower increases. This is the bee's nuts when it comes to killing.



Shooting isn't as tight as *GTA4*, but it's far from awful.

condition where they jerk, hitch and look worse than their console equivalents on a system above the recommended requirements. This is worse than *Crysis*, which was at least playable and good-looking at the lower settings. Taking *Saints Row 2* down a notch is like stepping back in time.

It gets worse when you see the condition the game is in. I'm not willing to rely on the promises of a developer here – there are some shocking bugs. In my first two hours of the game, at a seemingly random point, it crashed to the desktop. I loaded it back up to find I was over an hour back in time – apparently it hadn't decided to autosave after the two missions I'd done, and I had to replay some unenjoyable slogs.

When I eventually battled back past those points, I finally got into a groove –

"So I shop at Argos. What of it?"



Respect, y'naw

Taking over the neighbourhood

Stilwater is littered with different activities, side-missions and even jobs (such as taxi driving), and almost everything you do rewards you with respect. The more of this you have, the more missions you can play – which seems frustrating until you realise how much fun said side-missions are.

These include Crowd Control, a mode where you protect a celebrity by beating up and throwing their insane fans into

objects, Fight Club (beating the shit out of other men), or the utterly fantastic FUZZ missions, where a camera crew follows you as you fight crime dressed as a comedy policeman. You also get respect for killing other gang members, doing drive-bys (literally driving by a rival gang and shooting at them), and performing stunts in cars, *Burnout Paradise* style, which is most enjoyable while riding one of the many motorbikes.



enjoying spraying sewerage all over a house – when I opened up the menu to check my map. Only half the menu loaded, and the game seemingly alt-tabbed out. It wouldn't let me back in, and on reloading, I was once again half-an-hour back.

This followed having to navigate past several in-mission bugs: warping through cars, pedestrians somehow pulling me several metres across a park, and at one point my car errantly flying upwards from hitting nothing.

SHOT DOWN

These are not problems that I had in the hours I sank into the Xbox 360 version. They are ones that have been created by porting it to the PC, and it's not fair on you, dear reader, to have to deal with them. While *GTA4* had problems, *Saints Row 2* is, at times, a sorry mess – and I cannot and will not promise that there'll be a patch. It's one thing for a game to be lazily ported to the PC (see *Mercenaries 2*, issue 200), but to see it done with all the precision of a toddler trying to make Baked Alaska is plain insulting.

It's also deeply depressing, because I love what *Saints Row 2* should be – the manic, speedy counterpart to *GTA4*'s drama and industry clout.

It should be smooth, it should be fun, it should be a playable, silly, riotously enjoyable open-world adventure. Instead it's a hastily-ported and frustrating slap in the face for PC gamers, and I cannot gather enough venom towards how little respect there is here for the PC platform. Is it piracy that's destroying the industry or sheer laziness? We'll never know, but consider me disgusted at what this port has done to *Saints Row 2*. **PCZ**



PCZONE

Graphics Jerky, but colourful and well-animated
Sound Good radio songs, great voice acting
Multiplayer To 12 players with co-op

- ✓ Excellently written and acted story
- ✓ Missions are fun and varied
- ✗ Terribly optimised
- ✗ Buggier than Herbie
- ✗ No cover system

67

Say it saint so



The archer's the second-best class in the game



Someone got a bit over-excited...

LORD OF THE RINGS: CONQUEST

David Brown thinks this game is anything but his Precious

DEVELOPER Pandemic Studios
PUBLISHER EA
WEBSITE pandemicstudios.com/conquest
ETA Out now
PRICE £34.99

AT A GLANCE...

Lord of the Rings turned into a pretty poor hack 'n' slasher, interspersed with footage from the movie series.

Minimum system requirements:
2.4GHz processor, 1GB RAM, and a 256MB graphics card with support for Pixel Shader 3.

HOW IT STACKS

LORD OF THE RINGS ONLINE: THE SHADOWS OF ANGAMAR 90%
BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH: THE RISE OF THE WITCH-KING 87%
LORD OF THE RINGS: CONQUEST 43%

OH DEAR. ONE is tempted to be rather cynical about *Lord of the Rings: Conquest*, seeing as it's appeared following EA's announcement of hundreds of job cuts after not making as much money last quarter as it expected. Surely this couldn't be an entirely shameless attempt to leach money from unsuspecting *LOTR* fans around the world? I wouldn't dare ever make such a suggestion.

One thing not open to interpretation is the fact that *Conquest* plays like one of those tedious Koei games *Warriors Orochi* and *Dynasty Warriors*. Your character is far too big, and the larger ones almost entirely block your view – just like the Koei games. There's no way you can lock on to your opponents when involved in melee combat – just like the Koei games. The graphics are distinctly underwhelming (except perhaps for the Balrog) – just like those Koei games. No need to labour the point, I think.

Essentially then, for those of you who haven't had the dubious pleasure of

playing those titles, you'll spend 99.9% of your time in *Conquest* hacking your way through unlimited armies of respawning enemies (you'll know they're respawning because you see them materialising right in front of you). You'll be doing this in one of four guises: as a warrior, archer, scout and, worryingly for Tolkien fans, mage (see Blasphemy! overleaf).

CHARACTER BUILDING


The warrior is all about getting stuck into close combat, with powerful sword/axe attacks and swift group manoeuvres; the scout can cloak himself and perform an instant-kill backstab or throw a satchel charge into a group of foes; the archer can make use of fire and poison gas cloud arrows (the former useful for destroying objectives in later missions); and the mage can create a large area-of-effect shield to protect himself and his allies from missile fire, heal people and fire lightning bolts from his hands.

Each character has a reasonable number of skills, but the problem is that

at least two of them are effectively useless. I may just be rubbish with the warrior and scout, but you'll most likely be playing the majority of the game with the mage and the archer. This is for two reasons: first, lack of a lock-on ability makes chaining move combos together very difficult to achieve with regularity. What usually happens is that you hit the enemy twice and then he gets bashed to the floor. Unfortunately, your momentum takes you past him and you often end up slashing at thin air or trying to turn mid-combo, which produces similar results.


Meanwhile, the scout is too weak to get involved with melee combat, and his only really useful ability is cloaking. But relying on this is unrealistic when battles get more hectic, as there are simply too many enemies respawning at too fast a rate. By the time you've backstabbed the stronger enemies in one area, another batch have spawned.

This means you'll end up spending virtually all your time as an archer or mage. The nature




Gandalf now plays bass in a power metal band.

"You'll spend 99.9% of your time hacking your way through unlimited armies"



A headshot won't cut it this time.



Mages are a common sight, clashing with Tolkien's lore.

Look, a bandwagon!

Flogging deceased equines

Multiplayer co-op is all the rage nowadays (a full 15 years or so after *Doom* introduced it, but whatcha gonna do?), and *Conquest* hasn't missed a trick in including it.

Unfortunately, at the time of going to press, there was no opportunity to try any of the other co-op modes, including Ring Bearer, Capture the Ring and Hero Deathmatch. But it's basically the same as single-player and, as usual, makes the experience better with the addition of a companion.

of their ranged attacks mean you can stay away from the haphazard melee combat, suddenly making the game less of a furious button-clicking exercise and more of a considered combat game (to a small extent, anyway).

THE MAGIC TOUCH

As the archer, you can zoom in and pick off foes relatively quickly, causing more damage when zoomed than if you aren't. Presumably this is to simulate the increased accuracy of your shot when taking 'proper' aim, although it is just as easy to hit your target when not zoomed in (you can fire quicker, too). You also have a rather nifty kick that gets you out of trouble if enemies come too close.

The mage, though, is easily the most tactically diverse of all four classes, having chain lightning, area-of-effect and defensive abilities which can be used in various situations. As the mage, you're the equivalent of a damage class mixed

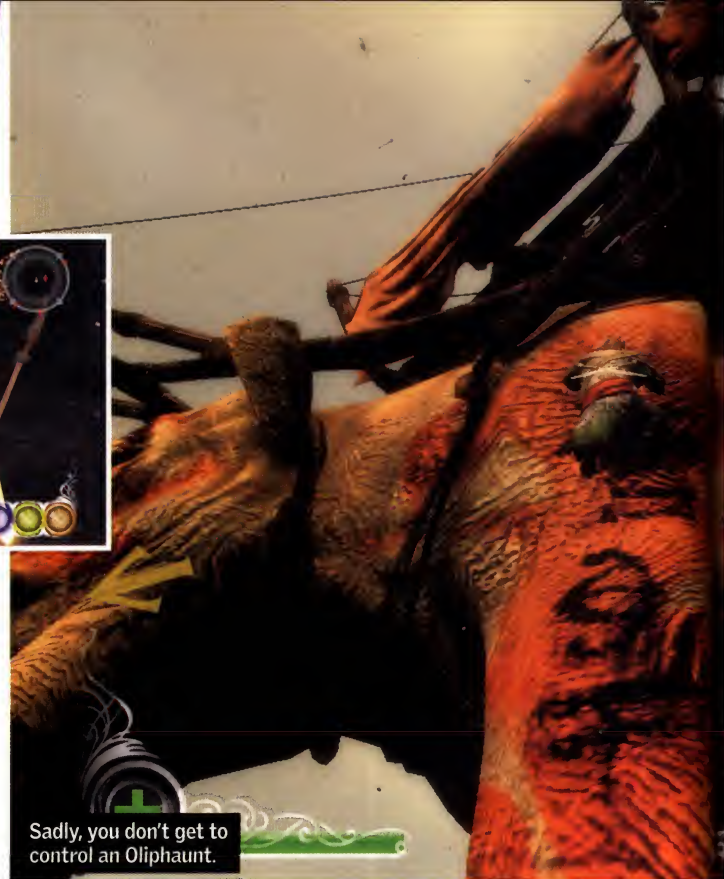
with a buff character, providing healing and protection from ranged attacks to anyone who sticks close to you. The AI doesn't seem to be able to use the mage properly, though, usually just spamming the energy



shield ability rather than using his powerful attacks.

Most importantly, the mage can heal himself, an ability that's vital later on. You can't recover health easily in any of the other classes, so you'll end up running about like a tit in a trance hoping for an AI mage to heal you. This is even more ridiculous when you find yourself in control of one of the hero characters.

From time to time you'll get the chance to play as one of the heroes from *LOTR*, such as Gandalf, Aragorn and Gimli. Later, in the *Rise of Sauron* campaign (an alternative version of the



story where Frodo is killed by a Nazgul before he can complete his quest), you can take control of Saruman, Sauron and even the Balrog. These are tougher than your average generic characters and

have slight variations on the usual class skills. The same problems apply, though: you'll still avoid playing Aragorn because you're forced to use melee attacks and can't heal yourself. Comically, it was easier to defeat Elrond and Legolas with an orc mage than it was with Sauron because of his lack of healing abilities.

The gameplay itself, with or without the use of heroes, is utterly repetitive and, dare I say it, almost dripping with the noxious juices of consolisation. Thankfully there aren't any "Press Left Trigger!" instructions, though I did have a



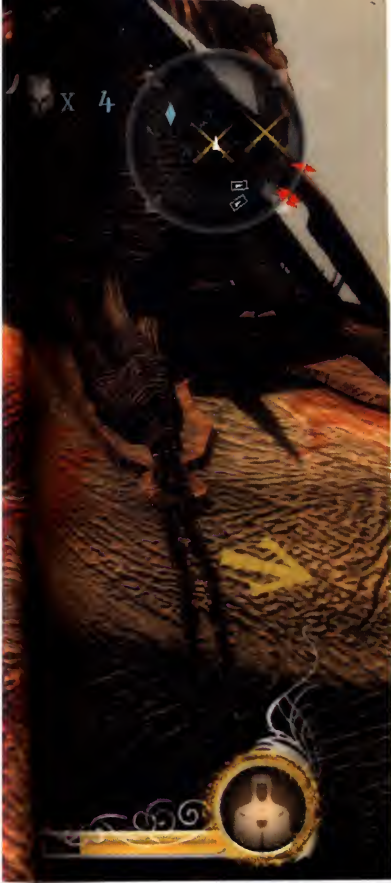
Blasphemy! Middle-earth - now with added mages



If it weren't for the mage class, *Conquest* would have been worse – but the point about the Middle-earth universe is that magic is a rare commodity, wielded only by a chosen few. So, why is it that mages are a common sight in these battlefields? Surely there was a way around this to keep the game closer to the Tolkien canon?

Being able to kill Saruman relatively easily with a generic mage pisses all over the carefully cultivated lore of the most revered fantasy franchise of all time. Nicely done, Pandemic.

He's called Gandalf the White – but he looks more beige or cream to us.



bit of a problem figuring out how to spawn as a hero when the option was made available (you press the left or right cursor keys). On the whole, nobody should be finding *Conquest's* control system difficult to get to grips with and the tutorial does its job well.

Unfortunately, this ease of use becomes one of the main problems. Because you get to grips with things very early on, you'll find yourself doing the same thing over and over and over again, constantly, throughout the entire game. The very first section (defending

"If you do play, you'll trudge on to the end. Unfortunately you'll have killed off half your brain cells in the process"

Helm's Deep) is one of its most interesting because it varies the template slightly by having you defend the outer walls of the city against siege ladders and sappers trying to destroy the walls.

From then on, things remain much the same throughout. Only the entry of the armies of Rohan provides a break from the action (also the one and only time I found the scout class to be useful). I'll be fair, and say that attempts are sometimes made to add something interesting to the mix (on a couple of occasions you get

to ride a horse into battle), but these parts are often easier to complete by, yes, doing the same as you've been doing for the rest of the game.

Being able to play as the likes of Sauron doesn't work with the feel of the

books too well, either. Taking control of *LOTR's* adversary and then being killed by a few elves doesn't feel at all right. Neither does the Balrog turning up in the Shire and being wounded by hobbits. What can also happen is that a random event – such as a giant eagle or bat swooping down over the battlefield – can lead to your hero being carried away and killed instantly, which can be both bemusing and frustrating. Still, no matter how flawed the game, it's still cool to trudge about the battlefield as the

Balrog or incinerate orcs as Gandalf.

Despite these bursts of entertainment, there's little to recommend in this game. At first glance the battles feel epic and large in scale, but you'll soon

realise that the actual area you'll be fighting in is tiny by comparison. When defending Helm's Deep, you'll see the limitless numbers of orcs stretching away into the distance, but only a handful of these ever come towards you.

While the number of characters on screen at any time can be surprisingly high, without your intervention, very little actually happens. As the game progresses, you'll often find yourself totally ignoring the majority of the enemies and just making a beeline for the objective. If you don't do this, you'll generally get bogged down and bored by the endless repetitive combat.

LORDY LORD

Despite all this, *Conquest* does have a curiously addictive quality that will keep you battling on until the end. Perhaps it's just the underlying quality of the *Lord of the Rings* story that keeps you playing – the "ooh, I'm fighting Saruman now!" factor. Or perhaps it's the occasional rush you get from killing 15 enemies at once with a well-placed power attack. Whatever it is, if you do decide to play *Conquest*, you'll almost certainly trudge through to the end, which has to count for something.

Unfortunately you'll have killed off half your brain cells in the process, as well as developing various RSI-related

affliction to your mouse hand. There are so many other things that are either wrong or just plain silly, but I haven't got space to list them all. *Lord of the Rings* deserves a better action game than this, and with the rich source material available to them, Pandemic and EA should be ashamed of themselves for unleashing this on the general public – even if we all know it'll go straight to the top of the charts regardless. **PCZ**

Sauron's Revenge What could have happened if Frodo had failed...



With the One Ring in Sauron's clutches, he sends his evil henchman Saruman on a renewed assault of Minas Tirith.



Pressing onwards, Saruman defeats Aragorn in battle at Weathertop, crushing the hopes of the forces of Good.



Sauron personally takes on the heroes Elrond and Legolas at Rivendell, destroying the forces of the elves forever.



In a somewhat one-sided battle the Shire – home to the hobbits – is ravaged by the Balrog, as Gandalf's last stand proves fruitless.

PCZONE

Graphics Unimpressive, sometimes shoddy
Sound Annoying
Multiplayer in-mission orders
Co-op and deathmatch options

- ✓ Strangely addictive
- ✓ Co-op play
- ✗ Utterly repetitive
- ✗ Occasionally ugly
- ✗ Far too console-y
- ✗ Fighter classes irrelevant

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Minas Bore-gul





WARHAMMER 40,000: DAWN OF WAR II

David Brown is worried he's about to have his genes stolen

DEVELOPER Relic
PUBLISHER THQ
WEBSITE dawnofwar2.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £34.99



AT A GLANCE...

With squad-based single-player mixed with traditional build-and-rush multiplayer mechanics, *Dawn of War II* should have something for everyone.

Minimum system requirements:
3.2GHz Pentium 4, 1GB RAM (1.5GB for Vista), and a 128MB graphics card with Shader Model 3.

HOW IT STACKS

STARCRAFT 88%

DAWN OF WAR 81%

DAWN OF WAR II 78%

LET'S GET THIS out of the way right at the start: yes, *Dawn of War II* is very different from the original in its core gameplay. No, this doesn't mean it's rubbish. No, there's no base-building. Yes, it's like a slightly stripped-down *Company of Heroes*, just with chainswords and Orks, instead of Thompsons and Nazis. If that is all you need to judge the game, go down to the final paragraph, scan the score and be on your way. For all the other people who like to read the actual words in a review, stay with me and I'll explain why the game works, doesn't work, and remains exactly the same as before, despite changing completely.

Relic's latest has as many explosions,

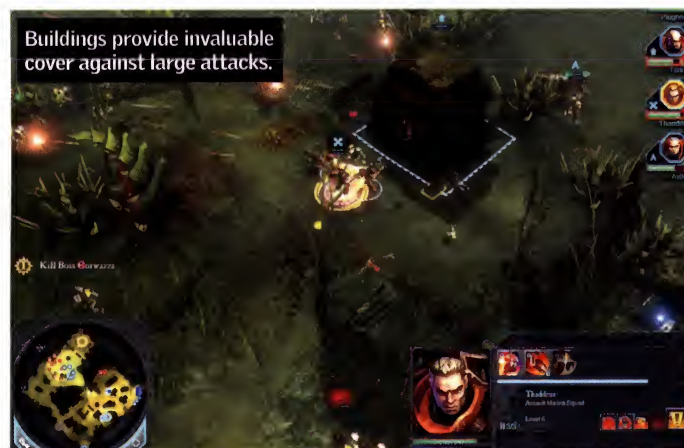
flying bodies and destructible pieces of scenery as you'd want in a game built on the current version of the Essence engine, the same one that carried *COH* along. This guarantees two things: fast action and a touch of strategic thinking. Not as much as you'd get in, say, *Soldiers: Heroes of World War II*, but enough to keep the majority of RTS fans happy. What's changed is that the base-building of *COH* has been completely done away with, so all you are left with is a stripped-down action-strategy game in which you concentrate solely on the units you have and what they are doing.

Some will be livid with this, loving as they do the traditional *Command & Conquer* style of build-base-build-army-

rush-army norm of action-RTS games. If you want this, your only recourse will be to load up the first *Dawn of War* or, as is perhaps more likely, to get involved with the multiplayer side of things (see 'Your base is under attack'). So, without the base-building side of things, the major emphasis is on combat. Thankfully, Relic have implemented this pretty well, although it isn't without its problems.

BASE DESIRES

As I've said, the combat is very much akin to what we've seen before in *COH*. You control small groups of soldiers, moving them about the battlefield to capture objectives and deal with the enemy. You control four of these groups at a time, although there are six (eventually) to choose from. These range from heavy weapons troops, who move slowly and can be used to pin the enemy down with suppressing fire, to quick-moving scouts who can cloak and get behind enemy lines to observe and/or launch surprise attacks. Each of these groups has unique abilities – scouts have cloaking devices and the assault squad jump-packs, while the heavy weapons guys stomp about the battlefield with heavy bolters and, later on, massive suits of Terminator armour, making them the ideal troops to weather the initial barrage of an enemy attack – and Relic have done a





Their heads always seem a bit too small.

Oh dear God, why?

There was no need for this...

The original genestealers and Tyranids were fantastic, all purple, menacing and terrifying. Remember *Space Hulk*? We'd be more likely to laugh instead of squeal in girlish terror if we saw a nu-genestealer running round the corner at us now. Even the Tyranids of *Advanced Space Crusade* (the board game) were miles better than they are now.

Admittedly, I've been out of the Games Workshop lark for about 13 years now, but still, I can't be the only one who is disappointed by the latest incarnation of the hive mind entities? Can I?



Orks rely on force of numbers to win the day.

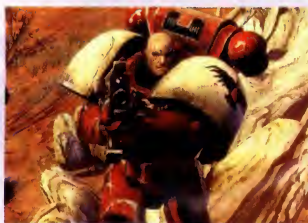
Squaddies

Meet the Team, Space Marine-style



THE BOSSMAN

This is you, the lantern-jawed squad commander in *DOW2*'s campaign. Very hard to kill and a loner on the battlefield, this is your most powerful unit.



THE GRUNT

Tarkus is the all-round guy who will do most of the grunt work for your squad and often the one you'll use to hold a battle line.



THE JUMPER

Thaddeus is a brash, confident leader of a three-man jumpack-wearing assault team. Use him to launch lightning strikes into the heart of the enemy's forces.



THE SCHWARZENEGGER

Avitus is the heavy weapons guy in your team, equipped initially with a heavy bolter and the ability to lay down suppressing fire.



THE SNEAKY BASTARD

Cyrus is the scout leader (not that kind – he doesn't hand out badges) who can turn himself invisible to infiltrate enemy positions or explore the terrain ahead.



THE MYSTERIOUS ONE

The sixth squad member gets unlocked later on in the campaign. We're not going to spoil the surprise, so you'll just have to play *DOW2* to find out who it is.

Hiding in a bush is surprisingly effective.



good job of making them all feel useful at different times. At no point will you fail a mission because you don't have one of them along, but you'll definitely feel "I could have used the scout there" or "those jump-packs would have been nice right about now" every so often.

What *DOW2* does well is avoid the select all units/attack trap so many action-RTS games fall into. Doing this will lead to defeat. Instead, you need to position your men behind cover or they'll just get shot to pieces. Selecting a group and moving the mouse pointer behind a wall or something will bring up a selection of coloured dots, indicating where your men will be standing if you decide to click there. Green means heavy cover, yellow means medium, and white means little to no cover at all.

Relic have been using this concept for a while now and it works as well here as it did in previous games. However, it isn't

without its problems, the main one being that sometimes it just doesn't work or it'll just be extremely illogical. Often, you'll move your pointer behind a wall and it won't assign positions to all the people in the squad. Sometimes it will put two of the three behind it and one will, for some reason, be stuck out in the open.

PLANT PROBLEMS

There's also a problem, specifically on the jungle missions, with the amount of cover available – leaves don't usually make a good defence against firearms, unless you're John Matrix in *Commando* and are running through a garden of bullet-deflecting rose bushes. Generally though, the cover system works and you'll only occasionally have a problem getting your men into good positions. You can also use buildings as cover, and while this offers them probably the best protection from enemy fire, it also leaves them vulnerable

Get caught out of cover and you'll soon take heavy damage.

Your base is under attack

Multplayer remains loyal to tradition



The first *Dawn of War* is kept alive by its multiplayer element, a finely tuned and well balanced build-and-rush mode with plenty of units, plenty of base structures and, with the addition of the four expansions, plenty of factions to choose from.

Although Relic have decided to tinker with the offline experience, they've not been insane enough to risk the global ire of *DOW* devotees by mucking about too much with the online segment. You won't see anything too revolutionary in *DOW2*'s

multiplayer – in fact, the only real differences are an emphasis on individual hero characters, a distinct lack of maps and only four factions to choose from (Marines, Orks, Eldar and Tyranids).

Each of these has subgroups within, but essentially there are only four. We expect a similar model to the first game, with two new factions coming with every new expansion. Despite this, it should be enough to bring the veterans over from the first to the second game, even if they might prove reticent at first.

Day 9
Crusade
Arcsakin Armor
Primitives

Gabriel Angelos, Captain of the 3rd Company

Gabriel Angelos is considered by many to be the finest of the living Blood Ravens and one of the greater heroes in the Chapter's history.

Gabriel currently commands the Blood Ravens 3rd Company, and his most recent victory was a crushing defeat delivered to the Tau in the Targa System.

Some of the recently destroyed world of Cygnus, he has led his company to glory.

to explosive attacks that can destroy the structure. One of my squads also got stuck trying to get out at one point, and I had to finish the mission without them.

The plot itself is centred around the Blood Angels chapter of the Space Marines, with you as a squad commander who must defeat the Empire's numerous enemies from capturing the chapter's base world. These enemies are the Orks, the Eldar and, for the first time in the *DOW* series, the Tyranids. To achieve this goal, you'll need to fight these three enemies over a number of worlds, locations and terrains.

"Various locations play important roles. This means that you'll visit the same maps again and again"

As for the missions themselves, most of them involve fighting your way across a map and then taking on a boss. There are variations – defending a location from attack for a certain amount of time, for example – but usually you'll be doing similar things in most missions. This is where *DOW2* stumbles into problematic territory. Things look promising from the outside: the mission structure branches across a number of different worlds and you can take them on in whatever order you want. You're given one deployment in a game day, although doing very well in missions (doing them quickly, with

minimal damage taken and so on) will give you bonus deploys on that day. This is useful for when the missions start to pile up and the only way you can do them all is by earning excellent scores.

However, the game's main problem is repetition. Relic have tried to create a realistic campaign, where various key locations play important roles in its development. Unfortunately, this means that you'll visit the same maps again and again. Although, having said that, some of these replays are optional.

Relic have made an effort to prevent this repetition by compressing the campaign structure from the earlier, more expansive code we saw a while ago, either removing the optional missions or making it more obvious they are purely secondary, but it still creeps in



A proper rocket jump.

too much for our liking. For example, in an early version of the game we saw, there were too many find boss, kill boss missions. A few of these have been changed to a relatively new Purge mission type, which does cut down on the repetition a little. These also have different starting locations, so it isn't just a case of repeating the same path every time you go through a map (although clearly you'll still know the terrain well enough for it to be a problem).

Another way Relic have tried to combat this is by introducing persistent objectives on each map, such as sacred Emperor shrines and communications relays. These grant bonuses when captured and can be used as fallback points when things are going badly. Move your damaged unit(s) back to one and you can have reinforcements delivered. There are also sentry points (marked as stars on the mini-map) which can be captured to provide reinforcements if needed. These aren't persistent, so you'll need to take these each time you play the map – something you are likely to avoid doing the umpteenth trip through a level.



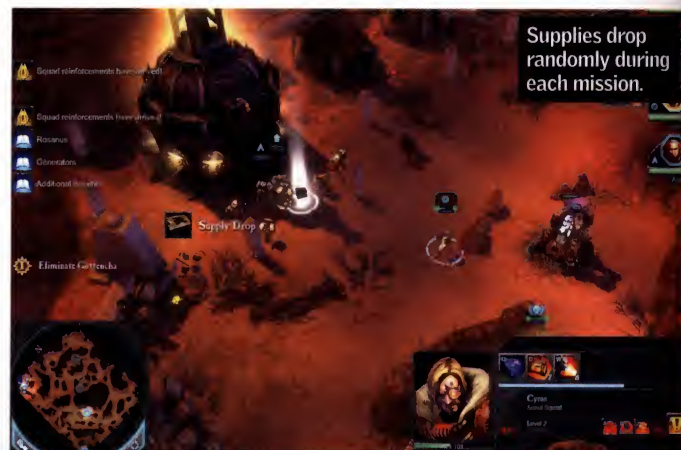
Antiques Roadshow

Relics and the art of finding stuff on the battlefield



Throughout the game, you'll come across relics that provide bonuses when equipped. Success in missions grant these items, but they're mainly dropped by random mobs and end-of-level bosses.

They come in the shape of improved weapons and armour, abilities and equipment, such as being able to deploy sentry guns, calling down orbital strikes and granting temporary invulnerability.



Supplies drop randomly during each mission.



Deep under cover...



Boss battles are pretty boring, to be honest.

Your commander in all his glory.

This is a shame and was something that could have easily been rectified during the development process. For example, each map could have been three times the size, with each visit unlocking a section for further exploration. That would have solved the repetition problem of without Relic needing to build four times as many maps.

Another aspect that differentiates the game from its predecessor is the addition of RPG-style levels and skills. In fact, the whole issue of characters is well implemented, as you definitely feel more of a connection to each one in comparison to the faceless drones of *DOW*.

As they kill things and complete missions, they gain experience and level up. Each type of character has four colour-coded bars to fill up, although the

meaning of each one changes for each character. As a general rule, purple means energy, yellow means strength, green means vitality and orange means weapons/ranged combat. You get two XP points to assign per level and we strongly recommended you make each one specialise in one or two fields, rather than spreading the point love, as it were.

GETTING TOGETHER

This becomes important when you get to the best part of the game (except for competitive multiplayer). This is co-op, where you can play the campaign through with a human ally, each taking control of half the squad. Like in *Soldiers*, you'll become attached to the people you are controlling and will be responsible for how they develop as you go on. It's also

easier to play the game, requiring less nimble hotkey usage and mouse-hand dexterity, as you only have one group to worry about. Plus, as you'd expect, co-op makes every game better, so if you can find someone to play it with you in this way, you might want to add a few points onto the eventual score.

The same goes for the regular multiplayer too, which is different enough to the offline experience to almost count as a different game. If you're playing the game almost specifically for that reason, stick 10 more percentage points onto the score, as you'll certainly be getting what you want from the game.

Having said that, there are elements of the multiplayer that need detailing.

First of all, Relic have streamlined the base-building in order to make the



The Tyranids

From beyond the very edge of the known world, swarms bent on consuming all

Guided by a terrible communal instinct, they exist solely to strip the universe

matter of weeks, Hive Fleets

actual fighting start more quickly. This might sound a good idea on paper, but it is just pandering to the speed-players who will perhaps have even more of an advantage over regular players?

Unit upgrades are now moved onto the units you control, so you can continue researching better weapons and abilities from the frontline instead of heading back to base all the time.

Bases themselves will now be constructed around resource points in the field, rather than on the extremities of the map.

Relic are hoping this helps create a more dynamic approach to the play, which it does to an extent. However, people will still just pick the nearest concentration of resources and build up a base there, so it doesn't change things too much in practice.

There are also the hero characters that can be controlled on the field of battle. Different types of heroes include healers, melee specialists, support heroes



The Tyranids just don't look as good as they used to.

that build turrets and so on, plus infiltrators that can cloak and plan surprise attacks. This is still essentially the same experience as the first game, just with a twist. You might even say it had a little bit more of a focus on working together as a team, but there's still that feeling of each man for himself floating about in there.

Lastly, there are some 'visual unlocks' to show off with – gold shoulder pads for your commander or floating runes surrounding your Eldar Farseer, that sort of thing. Optional and arbitrary these upgrades might be, but you'll still want them if you have the chance. Something else worth noting is that, at the time of writing, the only multiplayer maps are for one-on-one or three-on-three battles, which seems rather strange to us. You can still add AI players in though to make up the numbers. As Relic readily admit, *DOW2* owes a lot to *Company of Heroes*. In some ways, it feels like a

reskinned version of the classic RTS – which is a compliment, not a criticism.

SHORT OF GREATNESS

The action is visually exciting, the controls are simple to learn and use, plus they've got rid of the repetitive base-building in each mission you undertake. While the matter of mission repetition has been sorted out a little from when we first got our hands on the game, it's still potentially the biggest factor as to why people might be put off playing the offline single-player campaign.

While the special abilities of your units will be increasingly important as you up the difficulty settings, making sure you are in heavy cover is by far the most important thing you have to do to succeed. Unless the enemy manages to destroy said cover, with explosives or by other means, your men will be very difficult to dislodge.

In the end, the score below might not be the one you will have been expecting. While I had fun playing *Dawn of War II* and am glad to have done so, I never really felt a true sense of excitement or awe while playing and, perhaps because

of its reliance on the structure of *Company of Heroes*, it didn't feel groundbreaking either.

Yes, the explosions and graphics are nice, some of the visual effects are cool, the multiplayer is bound to be built upon and people will still be playing it in four years. But, on the other hand, I suspect virtually nobody will still be playing the single-player a few months after purchase. Relic have made an admirable stab at redefining the single-player action-RTS experience, but they haven't managed to nail it just yet. **PWZ**

PCZONE

Graphics Reasonable
Sound Generally OK.
Multiplayer Annoying voiceovers
What most people will buy it for.

- ✓ Lots of enemies
- ✓ Lots of explosions
- ✓ Lots of missions
- ✓ Lots of RPG elements
- ✗ Lots of repetition
- ✗ Lots of niggly problems

78

Sadly, not a classic

"DOW2 feels like a reskinned version of *Company of Heroes* – which is a compliment, not a criticism"

	Player	Position	Info	Condition	Rating	Goal
1	Dudu Aouate	GK		100	6.4	
6	Aniello Cutolo	AM RL		99	6.4	
5	Josemi	D RC + WB R		99	6.4	
2	Giuliano Portilla	D/WB L		99	6.4	
4	Luis Carlos	SW + D C		99	6.4	
3	Naoki Matsuda	SW + D C		99	6.4	
9	Juan Antonio Urteaga	AM R		99	6.4	
17	Cristian Corolani	AM/F C		99	6.3	
18	John Valencia	DM		99	6.2	
8	Kaio	AM C		100	6.4	
19	Pedro Ojeda	S		99	6.3	
12	Vitangelo Spadavecchia	GK				
13	Srdjan Pecelj	SW + D LC				
7	Gonzalo Colisa	DM				
14	Harold Peña	AM/F C				
11	Weldon	S				

Drag up to 3 substitutes onto outfield players to bring them on

Abuse will not be tolerated. [Change Topic](#)

FK Crvena Zvezda have submitted their team
Setting up the match...

Srdjan Savic says (15:16:39)
When you start, the chances of having household names are slim to none.

ges FM Live

0

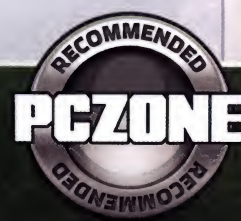
FK Crvena Zvezda

3rd in All Evening Qual 1

Head To Head Chat

Tactics: liv Set To Standard Tactics

FOOTBALL MANAGER LIVE



David Brown takes on the world in his brand-new tactics truck

DEVELOPER Sports Interactive
PUBLISHER SEGA
WEBSITE footballmanagerlive.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99 (with four months free play) then £22.99 every three months

AT A GLANCE...

The best football management series around takes the plunge and heads into the MMO arena.

Minimum system requirements:
1.6GHz processor, 256MB RAM (512MB for Vista), and a graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

FOOTBALL MANAGER 2009

FOOTBALL MANAGER LIVE **35%**

FIFA MANAGER 09 **67%**

WHEN THE IDEA of *Football Manager Live* was first mooted and the initial details became available, people were firmly split into two camps. There were those who were disappointed that real football teams wouldn't be included, and that *FML* wasn't setting itself out to be an online version of its parent. Others were just happy to be able to play *Football Manager* against a world full of humans, testing their skills against people for the first time.

Football Manager (and *Championship Manager* before it) has had an online option for a long time now, but this was restricted to a handful of players at most (apart from ultra-organised clan games) because players had a tendency to spend hours scouring the market, making everyone else wait. Sports Interactive have had to make significant changes to the way *FM* works in order to make it playable in the online arena, although anyone familiar with the offline version will be instantly at home.

At least, they will be until they come across one of the most fundamental changes. For one, instead of just creating a manager, you'll be putting together an entire club, right down to naming the stadium.

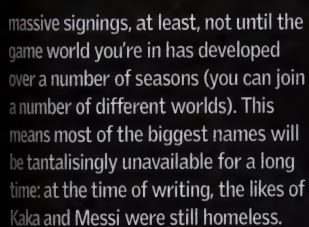
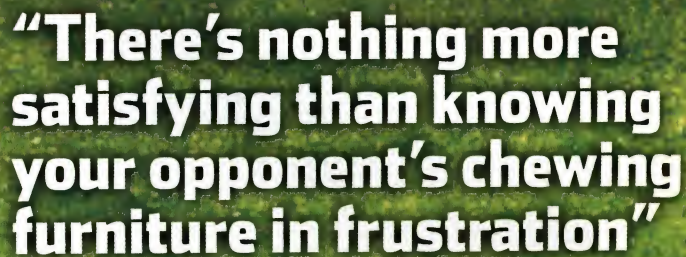
PICK YOUR PLAYERS

Many people have been disappointed with this decision, even going so far as to name their club after a real-world counterpart, but it gives you a great sense of connection to your creation. It's your club, and the squad you assemble becomes far more personal than a preset collection of players you had no control in selecting. This allows you to construct a squad based entirely on how you like to play the game, fitting players into your tactics, rather than the other way around.

This works well, but it has its drawbacks. You can pick who you want from real-world footballers (made-up players will appear as the game worlds grow older), but you're also competing with thousands of other managers.

To stop other gamers picking all the best players before you even get there, you'll start off with a small budget of £500,000 to assemble a squad. Money in *FML* doesn't work the same as it does in offline *FM*: there won't be any





What you'll end up with is a team of average-to-poor players, with a couple of stars thrown in. Your initial selection could prove vital in giving yourself a headstart over your opponents, but it isn't the be-all and end-all.

THRILLS AND SKILLS

As we know from *FM*, tactical skill can make up for the deficiencies of a weak squad. Because everyone will have a similar mix of players from the start, you shouldn't feel as if you have no chance to win any matches against other starter teams. However, this means that luck seems to be a bigger factor than perhaps it should be. As most people will have teams of almost

equal ability, it's very difficult to get a consistent run of results going.

This leads to the unavoidable scourge of MMOs: those who devote the most time dominate very quickly. SI have attempted to counter this by creating various different official competitions for people who play more, less or at different times of the day. Good idea in theory, but people have already begun to abuse this. It's the way of things that unscrupulous individuals will try to win at all costs, entering casual competitions in order to dominate more easily, earn more money and buy the best players. Good tactics and solid player acquisition can help you beat these players, and there's nothing more satisfying than knowing your opponent is chewing furniture in frustration at having lost to a much lower ranked opponent.

The match engine itself is effectively the same as the one in *Football Manager 2008*, but it only has the 2D blob mode available



My kingdom for a decent player!

Isn't it illegal to buy and sell people?

[illegible]

To make it easier to sell players, you can put your unwanted dross up for auction, as well as transfer listing them.

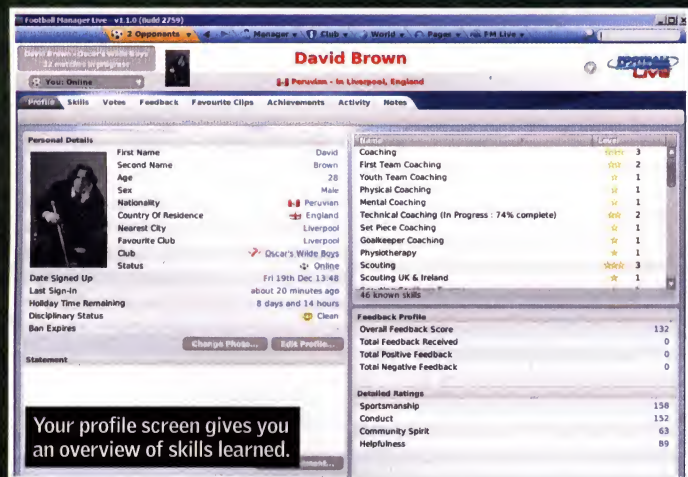
You set a minimum fee and an instant buy amount, which lets someone buy a player right away, avoiding the nail-biting tension of the eBay-like auction process

Usually though, players in here are a pile of shite.

If you want the best players, you should be keeping an eye on the transfer mailing list where managers hawk players out for 'bargain' prices rather than put them on the transfer list.



"The addition of an all-human world could revolutionise the football management genre"



(some will be thankful for this). This is one area SI have left alone, in terms of *FM*'s fundamentals. There's one important thing they have decided to change, though – the way tactics are implemented.

Being an MMO, SI have sought to extend the lifespan of the game by introducing a role-playing element to your manager. When you start out, you choose a template – tactician, super scout, physician, that sort of thing – and you're awarded a set of free skills. The templates give you a headstart; for example, choosing the tactician will grant you a lot of the starting skills you'd otherwise have to spend time learning.

From then on you have to learn the skills you'll be utilising. For example, if you want to play counter-attacking

football, your manager will have to learn this, unlocking the button in the tactics menu once this has been completed.

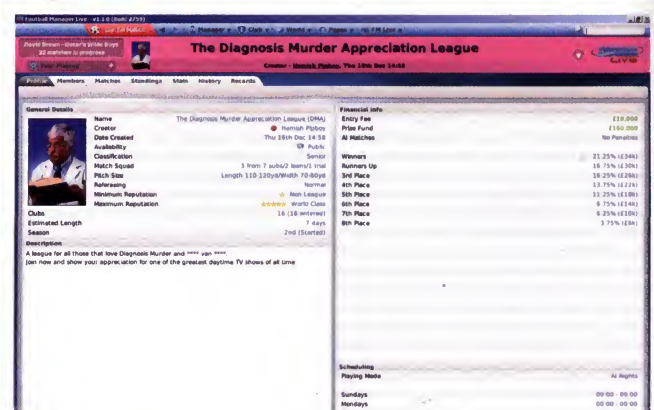
Initially this is frustrating, as you'll be wanting to tweak your tactics before and during matches but won't be able to. Once you get used to it, however, it adds an element of interest beyond the everyday grind of playing through your fixtures, especially when learning scouting skills. The higher the level of the skill you're learning, the longer it takes (the highest levels take nearly a month to learn), so you'll be there for the long term if you want to max out everything.

SCOUTING IT OUT

SI have made the conscious decision to hook players in for a long period with the skills system and a regeneration/youth

Customise this!

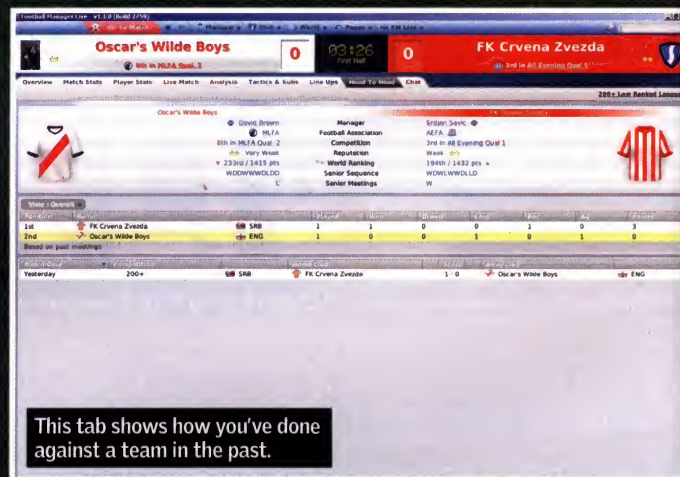
Design your own bizarrely themed match competitions...



Alongside the official leagues and cups, you'll also get the chance to create and organise your own friendly competitions. These can be available to the public or exclusive to your friends and contacts, and may include as few as six or as many as 1,000 teams, if you think that many people would want to enter. They can also be ranked (that is, your results

affect your world standing), purely friendly, or for youth and reserve sides, if you've decided to include these levels at your club.

Competitions can even be bizarrely themed, like this shrine to the wonderful Dick van Dyke and *Diagnosis: Murder* (above). Who wants to start a *PC ZONE* league, then?



This tab shows how you've done against a team in the past.

system that will slowly replace the established stars as game worlds age. Perhaps it will even add up-and-coming stars of the real world as time goes by? We certainly hope so.

As with any MMO, the community is key to the game's development. While you can set up friendly competitions with your mates, there are hundreds of unofficial tournaments cropping all the time, so you'll probably never be stuck for a match. Even if you've exhausted the competitions, you can challenge people to friendlies or just make yourself available to other players using the Match Finder. It's rare that you'll ever be waiting more than a few seconds for a match if you use this.

The scouting system is essentially manual – that is, you do your own

scouting for players – but the way SI have implemented it in *FML* is unique.

Scouting is contained within the Skills section of the game, and you learn it to view the full number of players in the game. Each time you scout a region, the game unlocks 5% more of the players from that area for you to view. This means you can snap up the bargains and hidden gems a long time before others can bid, so you don't necessarily want to neglect this area of the game in favour of being able to tweak the Closing Down slider by 15 instead of 10 notches, for example.

One thing that may put potential players off – considering a lot of people will have already forked out for *FM 2009* (and its predecessors) – is the cost. Charging around £8 a month for



what some are still calling an animated spreadsheet is potentially taking the piss. It isn't really that expensive (*FML* is cheaper than *World of Warcraft*), but we won't be surprised if gamers are reluctant to take up the *FML* challenge. If SI have miscalculated, it could defeat the whole purpose of *FML*. The fewer people playing, the less fun it will be, so players could be more reluctant to keep up their subscriptions. This is a vicious

circle that a number of newly-launched MMOs have suffered from (such as *Age of Conan*), and it could undermine the entire project, which would be a great shame.

SUBS' BENCH

However, SI seem to be aware of this and, in an attempt to counter it, are giving away four months' worth of playtime when you buy *FML*. Compared

to the standard 30 days' time other new MMOs offer, this is immensely generous. And four months should be plenty of time to get enough managers hooked to the point where they'll be willing to then cough up the subscription fee.

There's a lot to write about *FML* but only a limited amount of space to do so, so you'll have to forgive me if I've missed out some minor points. Essentially, SI have succeeded in transferring their offline management opus into the MMO arena, although they haven't yet managed to kill off the scourge of the obsessive MMOer. *FML* is one of those games that will reward those with lots of time on their hands more than the casual player. At least, that's the case at the moment.

There's so much potential here, and the game has barely kicked off, so we'll be revisiting it in State of Play in the near future. As it stands, it'll take the most determined of *FM* Luddites to avoid at least giving *FML* a go. The addition of an all-human world could potentially revolutionise the football management genre, making this evolution its most important step forward yet.

While *FML* may have some faults, the addictive *Football Manager* gameplay we know, love and tear our pubic hair out in rage over is there in a different, equally intriguing form. So if you think you can take me on, search for Oscar's Wilde Boys.

PCZONE

Graphics Functional
Sound Minimal to none
Multiplayer The entire game

- ✓ It's still *Football Manager*
- ✓ Keeps you occupied for hours
- ✓ Vast database
- ✓ Human opponents...
- ✗ ...who could have an advantage by playing a lot
- ✗ Price issues

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Match of the Day



How your intrepid, simulated hero looks.

Chinese Soldier

FALLOUT 3: OPERATION ANCHORAGE



Ed Zitron pulsates with a healthy green glow

DEVELOPER Bethesda
PUBLISHER Microsoft
WEBSITE fallout.bethsoft.com
ETA Out now
PRICE 800 Microsoft points (about £7.50)

AT A GLANCE...

An on-the-cheap three-hour expansion that focuses mostly on shooting the same man over and over.

Minimum system requirements: 2.4GHz processor, 1GB RAM (XP) (2GB Vista), and a 256MB video card. *Fallout 3* and an internet connection also required.

HOW IT STACKS

FALLOUT 3 91%

OBLIVION: THE SHIVERING ISLE 87%

OPERATION ANCHORAGE 44%

FALLOUT 3 IS a game that is made great by its inability to keep the player in one place. The whole thrust of the wasteland is that you are a wanderer – one who crosses a vast expanse with only one goal that you can ignore. This is enhanced by the scrambling to find ammo, stimpaks, fresh weaponry, inbetween *Mad Max*-style battles with crazed raiders.

Furthermore, one of its beauties is its distinct lack of linearity – for the most part, you can do anything you want, in any order, and however you like. Hidden within these layers of action RPG is a workable FPS – and, stupidly, Bethesda have felt that the first downloadable content for this game should be built around *Fallout 3*'s weakest assets.

After leaping over the Games for Windows – LIVE installation and dealing with the mod-hating new patch, the start

of *Operation Anchorage* is positive. You receive a transmission that directs you towards an elevator, where you meet with a group called the Outcasts. These individuals – ex-Brotherhood Of Steel power-armoured types – make vague, grunted threats at you, before asking you to enter a simulation of the battle to free Alaska's capital, Anchorage, from Chinese forces. This simulation is apparently the requirement to open a door to a supposed bevy of ammunition, joy, and possibly plot.

Picky or not, this is a rather shit plot device, especially considering the radio broadcast that draws you towards them says that it's an emergency. In reality, it's

a bunch of bored-looking soldiers with by-the-numbers dialogue who direct you towards a simulation to open a door. Bethesda's writers could and should have done better.

SNOW JOKE

On entering the simulation, you're faced with a series of cliffs and a general who insists you follow him up a ridge and kill some Chinese soldiers. This begins an hour-long excursion into *Medal of Honor: Boring Snowy Cliffs* as you bundle through doorways, killing the same bad guy repeatedly, using VATS or the slightly wonky combat engine. To make matters worse, there are no

"An hour-long excursion into *Medal of Honor: Boring Snowy Cliffs*, killing the same bad guy repeatedly"

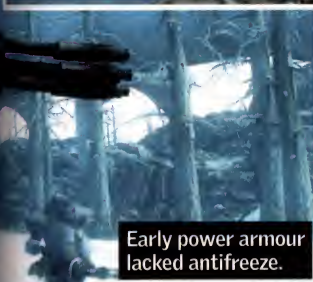




A battle far too reminiscent of *Final Fantasy 7* for our liking.



At this point, you'll have killed this Chinese soldier 200 times.



Early power armour lacked antifreeze.

stimpaks – only ammo dispensers and health containers that restore everything on your person. Disappointingly, enemies disappear with a weird fizzly effect – you can't even loot them.

After slogging past this awkward section, you're teleported to the main base. Things only go further downhill. The two remotely clever ideas in this downloadable content – squads and weapon load-outs – are quickly doused in the thick gasoline of mediocrity. The former has you select a limited load-out of teammates – robots or soldiers – with different guns in their hands. They're uncontrollable and merely stand behind you, providing covering fire, which wasn't revolutionary in *Baldur's Gate*, let alone here. "Weapon load-outs" are just a way of stopping you from having to loot weapons – you're locked into a few set guns depending on how you want

to play. The battle for Anchorage itself is set up in a surprisingly linear and deeply contrived manner.

There are three objectives – the third of which is the removal of the pulse wall, which can only be done by completing the first two. These boil down weakly to "kill all the bad men in this area," a distinctly anti-*Fallout* prospect.

KILLING CLONES

These enemies range from generic to half-interesting, with the Crimson Dragoons using stealth to avoid your VATS-targeting. Otherwise, you spend 90% of your time shooting the same terrible AI soldiers.

Worse still, your objectives are so linearly placed and pointless that Bethesda may as well have skipped them altogether. You walk out from the camp. To the left is one objective, to the right is another, and the third – the pulse wall – lies in the middle. If you walk too far forward you'll die – almost instantly – from a shower of bombs. It's almost as if Bethesda forgot what made *Fallout 3* a joy – or the recession started to tug at them to make money.

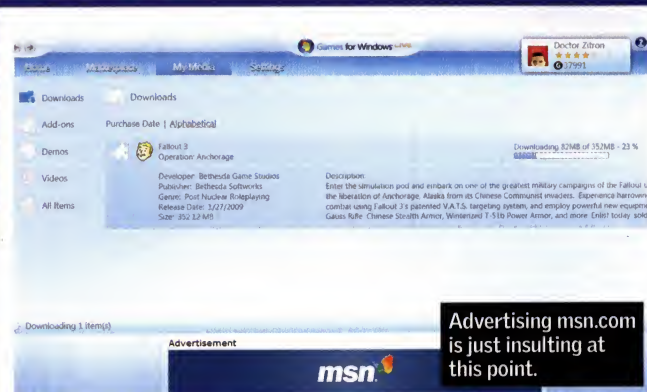


"Stop! You've got a plot device on your wrist!"

But... Maybe there's more to you than the average rubble dweller, huh? That computer there on your wrist...

"Up yours, PC gamers," says Microsoft

Games for Windows Marketplace: A terrible omen



Advertising msn.com is just insulting at this point.

To buy *Operation: Anchorage*, you have to register for and install the Games for Windows – LIVE Marketplace, a horrible mutation of the Xbox LIVE Marketplace.

This screen-filling, light-blue monstrosity requires you to buy Microsoft Points, 800 of them to be precise, to buy *Operation Anchorage*. However, you can only buy points in 1,000 point lumps which costs you £10 a time – and there's precisely jack and shit you can do about it. The only good thing about this is you can spend the points on stuff from the Xbox LIVE Marketplace. If you have an Xbox.

As there's nothing else to buy on the PC, you'll waste at least part of your money buying *Operation: Anchorage*. Furthermore, Games for Windows Marketplace requires you to both download and install the expansion through the service. Better yet, you then have to stay online to use it.

It's an utter shock that Microsoft found a way to make PC gaming transactions as awkward and time-consuming as on consoles. It shows not only a complete lack of respect for PC gamers, but a failure to understand the market. Thanks a lot, guys.

The icing on the cake is the final battle which is totally automated and won by robots (actually badly reskinned Brotherhood of Steel soldiers). There's little or no ending, no closure, and no point to anything that goes on in this expansion. Even the gear and extra perk you receive are useless if you've played more than a few hours of *Fallout 3* (and totally, if you haven't unlocked Power Armour yet), and the three or so hours you sink into the mission are lifeless.

Finally, I can't deplore enough how little story there is. I had high hopes that Bethesda would pull out some wacky lore, gadgets and kitsch '50s nonsense. But instead of *Fallout 3: Operation Anchorage*, I got *Medal of Honor: Linear Arctic Shooter*. Wrapping it in the virulent Games for Windows packaging only makes this mess more insulting.

While many say that next DLC packs *The Pitt* and *Broken Steel* will redeem Bethesda's DLC plans, I'm now utterly cynical. All this pack does is prove that they have either missed the point of the franchise, the point of *Fallout 3*, or they've just become as money-grabbing and soulless as everyone else.

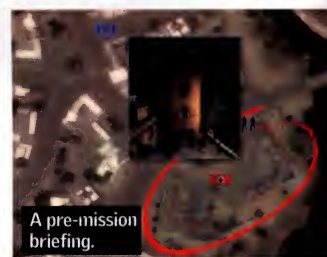
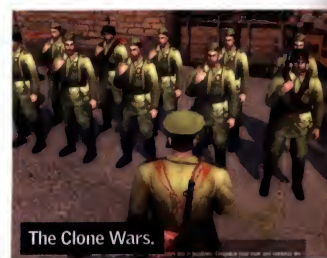
Spend the Microsoft Points on some *Rock Band* tracks instead of this tripe – they're far more enjoyable. **PCZ**

PCZONE

Graphics It's *Fallout 3*
Sound "DIE AMERICAN!"
Multiplayer Arguing on forums about GFWL

- ✓ You're given stimpaks
- ✓ Focuses on FPS elements
- ✗ Linear
- ✗ Dull as bricks
- ✗ Games for Windows – LIVE

44
Worse than Horse Armor



MEN OF WAR

David Brown wonders why they can't all just get along

DEVELOPER Digitalmindsoft
PUBLISHER 1C Company
WEBSITE 1cpublishing.eu/
 game/men-of-war
ETA 27 Feb
PRICE £29.99



AT A GLANCE...

The *Soldiers* series gets an 'if it ain't broke' makeover with larger battles, more of them and some cool explosions and destruction thrown in.

Minimum system requirements:
 2.6GHz Pentium 4, 1GB RAM, and a 128MB graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

SOLDIERS: HEROES OF WORLD WAR II 90%

MEN OF WAR 76%

FACES OF WAR 75%

CAST YOUR MIND back a few years and you may well recall a plucky little WWII strategy game going by the name of *Soldiers: Heroes of World War II*. It was great, we loved it and lavished word-related praise on it. Despite this, it didn't sell as many copies as it should have done, but it did well enough to be rewarded with a sequel – *Faces of War*.

By this time, people were fed up of the setting and potential buyers ignored it, preferring to bask in the glow of their X-Stations and Playboxes. But Russian behemoth 1C weren't to be stopped. Now they've returned to WWII, aiming to make the *Soldiers* experience bigger, better and more successful.

Men of War resembles a loot-based role-playing title (such as *Commandos*,

Diablo or *Sudden Strike*) where you control small squads of men from a tilted top-down perspective across a well drawn and animated map. It also has elements of *Company of Heroes* – move your pointer over a piece of scenery and silhouettes of your men appear, telling you how they will deploy themselves behind or around it. In fact, it does this better than *Relic's* game.

WAR IS FUN

There's a choice of three campaigns to plough through (Soviets, Germans and Allies) either solo or co-operatively (incidentally, the definitive way to play the game). Most maps expand as you progress, becoming larger the more objectives you complete. Bear in mind when you're playing, you'll rarely get the chance to replace downed men. What you start a mission with is usually what you finish with, so caution is advised.

Graphically, *Men of War* is pleasant enough and it'll run on most systems. Some slowdown occurs on the more congested maps, but most of the time the game plays smoothly. The audio isn't a problem – until the characters speak. The voice-

acting really, really doesn't work and you actually feel embarrassed to be listening to it. This is a shame, because as a strategy game, very few titles reach the epic scale and excitement of *Men of War's* biggest battles.

If you loved *Soldiers*, you'll love this. If you've no idea what that game was about, try a demo of this. It is unlikely you'll be disappointed. **PCZ**



PCZONE

Graphics Decent when zoomed out
 Sound Bad voiceacting
 Multiplayer Co-op and other options

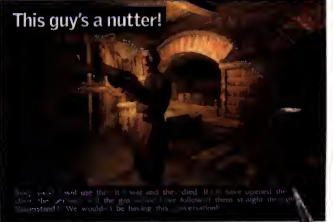
- ✓ Great cover system
- ✓ Exciting strategy
- ✓ As fun as *Soldiers*...
- ✗ ...but hasn't moved on
- ✗ Graphics a bit weak

76
 Solid, epic strategy

One of Jurgen Klinsmann's ancestors, perhaps?



This guy's a nutter!



"Can you speak up a bit, I'm Death."



NECROVISION

David Brown likes bayoneting Germans zombie vampires

DEVELOPER The Farm 51
PUBLISHER 1C Company
WEBSITE 1cpublishing.eu/game/necrovision
ETA 27 Feb
PRICE £24.99

ZOMBIES, VAMPIRES, HUGE spidery things with rocket launchers attached on various places of their anatomy and one long stream of enemies to mow down with your machine guns. *NecroVision* is a dinosaur, clinging to a lot of the gaming conventions we so viciously decried in our last issue – exploding barrels, switches, big boss monsters with inordinate amounts of health, etc. While it does nod towards modernism on a couple of occasions, what with its challenges, combos and unlocks, there's hardly anything here you won't have seen before.

Is this a bad thing? As usual the answer is yes and no. There's no pretension here, and no sheen of originality covering a generic shooter. *NecroVision* is out-and-out old school corridor (or rather trench) blasting and is unrepentant about it. Set in WWI, you take the role of a wise-cracking US

soldier, curiously fighting for the British even before his fellow countrymen have joined the war. (Is there any other kind of gaming American?) You're sent over the top by a bumbling General Melchett-esque character, which inevitably leads to you and your buddies getting cut down by a wave of machine gun fire and mustard gas.

This atmospheric introduction leads you to a cutscene in which a grotesque creature – heavily inspired by *Hellraiser*'s cenobites – uses barbed chains to tear an innocent squaddie apart.

TRENCHED DESIGN

After this, you find yourself in a bunker with a crazed (and very well acted) British soldier, who you end up killing and dispossessing of his rifle. From here on, you're in *Painkiller* territory (no surprise, as half the team behind that series is responsible for *NecroVision*) – lots of enemies, visceral bloodshed and gore, huge enemies, guns and explosions: they're all here.

Sadly, so is the feeling of repetition and weariness you get after your hundredth room of zombies. The boss encounters are exciting on the face of it, but once the initial wow factor has passed, you'll probably end up frustrated at the monotony of each encounter.

As with most old-school blasters, *NecroVision* is fantastic fun in small doses, but extended play makes for mind-rotting boredom much quicker than you'd expect. As gamers, we've moved on and demand more – certainly if we intend to be playing for more than 30 minutes. There's a lot of fun to be had here in the zombied and vampired version of WWI's battlefields, but only if you stick to your strict gaming rations. **PCZ**

AT A GLANCE...

Resolutely old school FPS blaster from some of the people behind *Painkiller*, set in a zombie vampire infested WWI.

Minimum system requirements:

2.4GHz Pentium 4 processor, 1GB RAM (1.5GB Vista), and a 256MB graphics card with Pixel Shader 3 support.

HOW IT STACKS

PAINKILLER	83%
NECROVISION	64%
PAINKILLER OVERDOSE	38%



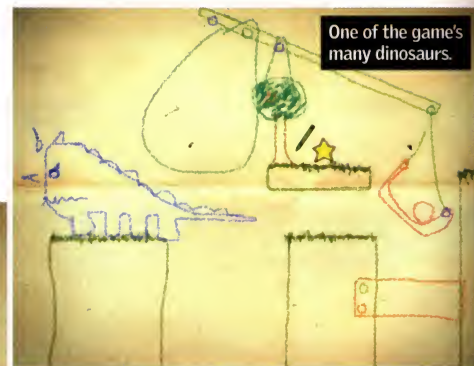
PCZONE

Graphics Patchy
Sound Adequate
Multiplayer Straightforward
solo shooting

- ✓ Constant blasting
- ✓ Lots to kill and blow up
- ✗ Too much blasting
- ✗ Repetitive
- ✗ Not as good as *Painkiller*

64
Necropolis Now

Developer Petri Purho's self-portrait.



One of the game's many dinosaurs.



My incredible solution.



This didn't work.

CRAYON PHYSICS DELUXE

Steve Hogarty draws some conclusions

DEVELOPER Kloonigames
PUBLISHER Kloonigames
WEBSITE crayonphysics.com
ETA Out now
PRICE \$19.95 (approx £14)



AT A GLANCE...

Draw things! Watch them become real!
Solve puzzles! It's like magic.

Minimum system requirements:
1GHz processor, 512MB RAM, and a 128MB graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

WORLD OF GOO 90%

CRAYON PHYSICS DELUXE 71%

ARMADILLO RUN 68%

UNLIKE PENNY CRAYON'S artwork the objects you draw in *Crayon Physics Deluxe* don't spring magically to life. Instead they become solid, dead weights – perhaps as part of a clever pulley system or a cunningly positioned lever. Penny wouldn't be best pleased with this situation. In fact, she'd be downright upset if a dinosaur she drew flopped dead at her feet due to a lack of a carefully drawn central nervous system. But that's just how things are in *Crayon Physics Deluxe*.

The aim is to move a red ball to a star. You've no direct control over the world (beyond nudging the ball left or right), instead your power lies in your ability to drop objects of any shape into the level, bolting them together with hinges or tying them to one another with ropes. Rudimentary as that sounds, it allows for a range of proper mechanical structures: buckets and pulleys, springboards, hammers and ramps, even cars. And unlike similar physics puzzlers where your resources may be limited, the scope

for creativity here is near-boundless. Your solutions can be as imaginative or complex as you like, whether that means creating screen-filling Rube Goldberg contraptions or simply drawing a flower at the end of a stick.

This lends an air of open-endedness to the 70 levels, a feeling that ultimately works against the game's premise. Once you've mastered some of the simpler mechanics – say, setting up a swinging weight to kick the ball towards the star, or drawing a box around the ball and tying it to a falling weight to drag it across the level – you'll find yourself over-reliant on them. Most of the levels can be solved with a handful of basic tricks, and while the opening dialogue suggests that *Crayon Physics Deluxe* is more about thinking up inventive solutions than efficient ones, you're rarely inspired to challenge yourself when an obvious route to the star is staring you in the face.

Happily, later levels force you to innovate, providing a much appreciated difficulty spike, and the in-built level

editor suggests there'll be a constant stream of new levels made available in later months. As long as you realise that *Crayon Physics Deluxe* is a sandbox in disguise, you won't be disappointed by this charming physics puzzler. **PCZ**

PCZONE

Graphics **Wonderfully stylised**
Sound **Original, calming tunes**
Multiplayer **Non!**

- ✓ It looks like crayons
- ✓ Make cunning contraptions
- ✓ Level editor
- ✗ You challenge yourself
- ✗ Pricey for an indie game

71

Drawn out



"Gnarly board, dude!"

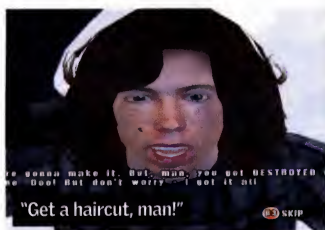
SHAUN WHITE SNOWBOARDING

500 points for sliding into a snowdrift

DEVELOPER Ubisoft Montreal
PUBLISHER Ubisoft
WEBSITE shaunwhitegame.us.ubi.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99

Minimum system requirements:

2.4GHz Pentium 4 or Athlon 64 2800+ processor or better, 512MB RAM, and a GeForce 6600 or ATI 9800 or better.



TONY HAWK HASN'T landed on our desktop for a while, and even then that was the poor *American Wasteland*. *Shaun White Snowboarding* is Ubisoft's attempt to steal the skateboarding series' crown, while adding an intriguing new multiplayer element to the mix.

This is a drop-in/drop-out multiplayer option that allows you to join a friend's single-player experience and then play about with them. As a virtual lobby, it works well and is something that more games should consider doing.

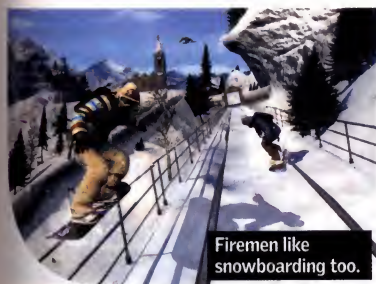
Unfortunately, things go rapidly downhill from there (suitably enough). You start off at the top of a big mountain and slide down it, collecting big coins, pulling off tricks, entering events and finding secret areas. There's a lot to see and do, which is kind of the problem. When you first start, there's

almost too much going on and you don't really know where to start. *Tony Hawk* games gave you a similar number of things to do per map, but they make things much more focused and easy to find. *Shaun White*'s mini-map can be confusing until you figure out what each crudely drawn symbol means.

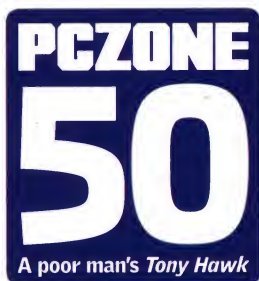
Handling is fiddly too, on both control pad and keys, and it doesn't feel as fun to play as *Tony*'s series. Levels and locations aren't as amusingly themed or varied in *SWS*, primarily because there are only so many things you can do with snow.

Another *Tony Hawk* clone is always welcome, even for keyboard obsessives like myself, but as cheap as *Shaun White Snowboarding* is, there's probably more fun and value for money to be had in just buying one of the *Tony Hawk* games. And that's snow joke (sorry). **PCZ**

David Brown



Firemen like snowboarding too.



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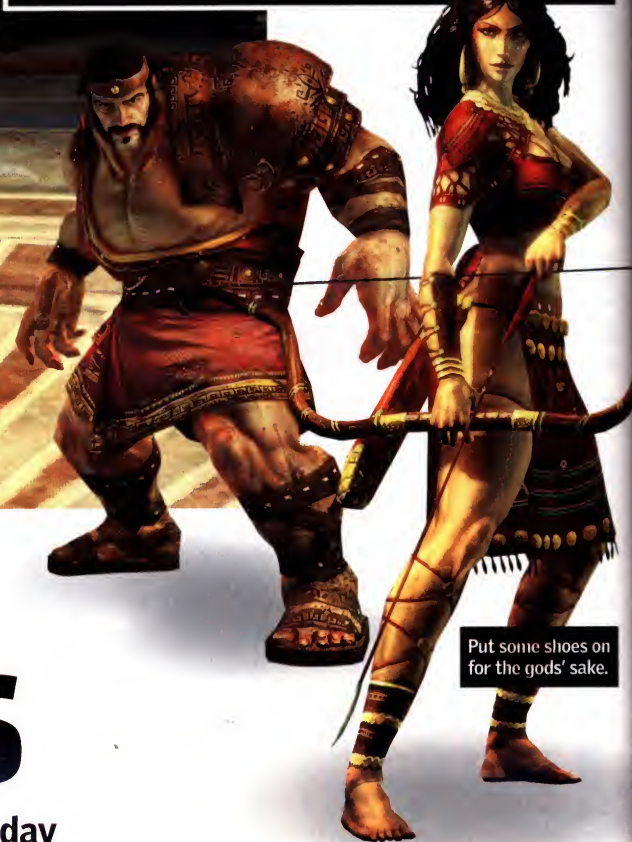
Q qantm COLLEGE



It's the neck's best thing.



His head opens like a lunchbox.



Put some shoes on for the gods' sake.

RISE OF THE ARGONAUTS

David Brown could take Hercules in a fight any day

DEVELOPER Liquid Entertainment
PUBLISHER Codemasters
WEBSITE codemasters.co.uk/argonauts
ETA Out now
PRICE £34.99

AT A GLANCE...

Codices take a leaf out of BioWare's book, put it in a pot full of Greek myths, and boil up a tasty gaming broth.

Minimum system requirements:
3GHz Pentium 4, 1GB RAM (1.5GB Vista), and a GeForce 6800 or Radeon X1300 graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

MASS EFFECT 92%

JADE EMPIRE 89%

RISE OF THE ARGONAUTS 68%

THE FIRST THINGS you'll feel when loading up *Rise of the Argonauts* are disappointment, anger, and a sense of impending doom. However, these sensations are fleeting and, despite a few niggles, anyone who likes BioWare's RPGs will be completing this game. While it isn't as good as that studio's titles, Liquid Entertainment have made an enjoyable game people will remember fondly.

You'll have to overcome the initial bad feelings, of course. For a start, you can't redefine your keyboard controls, nor does it seem possible to tweak more than the resolution in terms of graphical settings – evidence that the game is obviously console-oriented in design and execution. Usually, this would be a very bad thing, but Liquid haven't churned out an entirely dire, dumbed-down mess.

The closest comparison to *Argonauts* I can make is *Jade Empire*. Initially the combat system is weak and repetitive. While it is one of the weakest elements of the game, it does get better as you go on, with more moves, abilities and

weapons being made available over time to keep things interesting. And while there's a lot of fighting, it's never overwhelming as there's a lot of interaction with NPCs, using a *Mass Effect*-like conversation interface.

The RPG elements come in the form of Aspects, which you can earn throughout the game and assign to various skill paths, granting new abilities and powers. There are also four gods to win the favour of – Ares, Hermes, Athena and Apollo – each of which provide different bonuses when pleased. And in a nod to BioWare's many works, you'll recruit an assortment of mythological heroes to form the Argonauts, including Pan (a god), Hercules (a half-god), and Achilles (who thinks he's a god).

The plot and setting are the best things about *Argonauts*. Liquid have done a brilliant job at making you feel part of the ancient world of Greek mythology. The combat is too much like random button-bashing for my liking, but it has enough sophistication to keep things interesting until you finish it.

Rise of the Argonauts will have its detractors, but it really is one of those games that you need to avoid trusting your initial instincts with. Persevere a little and you'll soon be having a lot of fun. **PCZ**

PCZONE

Graphics Functional, sometimes very good
Sound Acceptable acting
Multiplayer None that we could find

- ✓ Rich scenario to explore
- ✓ Has hidden depths
- ✓ Decent graphics and sound
- ✗ Combat can be repetitive
- ✗ Easy to dismiss early on

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Better than you think

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WANT MAGS AND A MOUSE?
TURN TO PAGE 102



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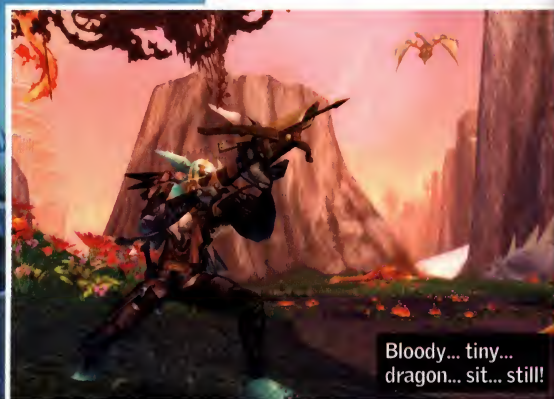
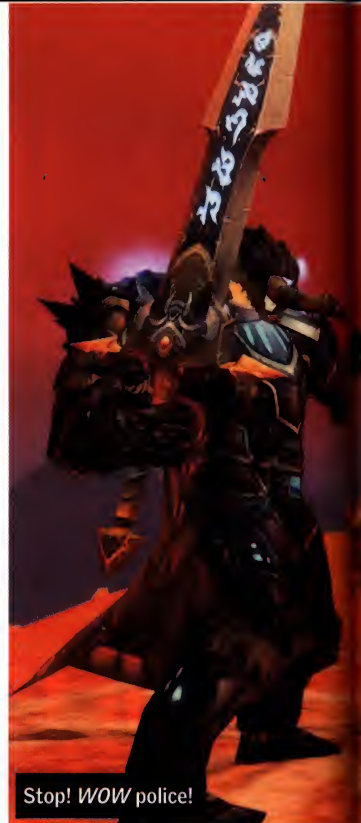
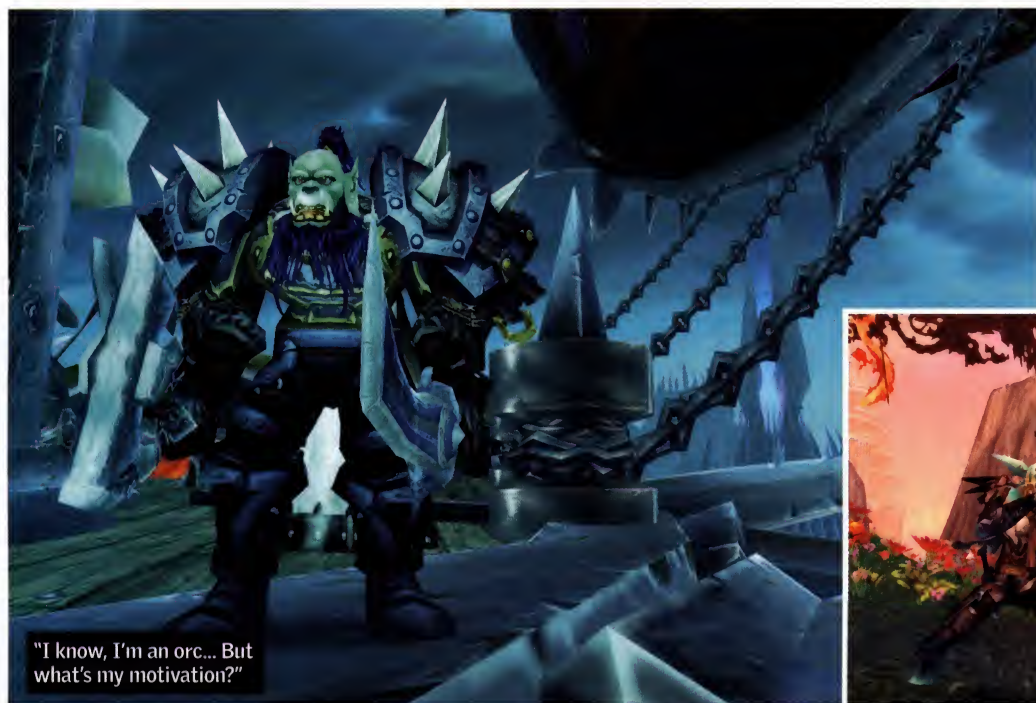
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STATE OF PLAY

Developers tinker with their games after their release. With this in mind, every month we cast fresh eyes on the changes seen in long-running games...



THIS MONTH...

WORLD OF WARCRAFT

PUBLISHER Activision Blizzard WEBSITE worldofwarcraft.com PRICE £9.99, then \$14.99 (£11)/month

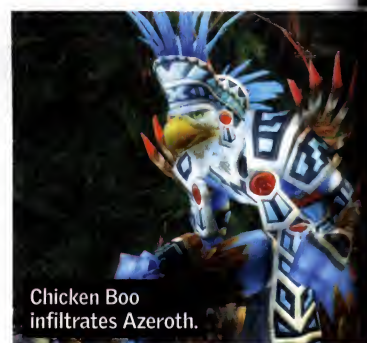
IF YOU'RE READING this, most likely you're just like us: you've played *World of Warcraft*, maybe for hours, grinding to 60 or 70, then decided it wasn't for you (after realising how much time you'd spent in Azeroth) and promptly quit. But everybody – even those who played it only briefly – feels the itch from time to time to return and see whether the world's biggest fantasy MMO has changed – only to find that it's still the same, charmingly addictive hamster-wheel it's always been. With every update there's a little tweak or polish, and depending on how long you've been away, varying levels of changes make it appeal to anyone, from casual man-babies to full-on neck-beard veterans.

If you gave up before it was released, *The Burning Crusade* changed a great deal. There were two new races added – the Blood Elves and the Draenei – but

the most notable alterations were to Blizzard's design philosophy. While some of the original zones and dungeons had quests that were badly spaced and flowed in an irksome fashion (Ashenvale, for example), *Burning Crusade* areas were beautifully crafted. From the lower level areas such as the Ghostlands to the Hellfire Peninsula and Zangarmarsh, *WOW* became far more pragmatic and geared towards clusters of quests. And 60-70 was, for all intents and purposes, a great deal more fun and dramatic than the relative slog from 30-60. This included bombing runs that had you riding bats or gryphons and dropping

explosives on huge crowds of enemies, and the Hellfire Citadel, a multi-level instance towards a final raid against Magtheridon of *Warcraft III*.

After *The Burning Crusade*, patch 2.3 led *WOW*'s developers to tweak every level between 30 and 60, and re-tuning most quests to reward more experience. They also, after leaving it rather sparse after release, filled in Dustswallow Marsh with a series of 30+ quests, which filled a gap once hastily covered with grinding instances. Suddenly the Scarlet Monastery was no longer a source of RSI, and the Hinterlands were an enjoyable romp that scored you a level

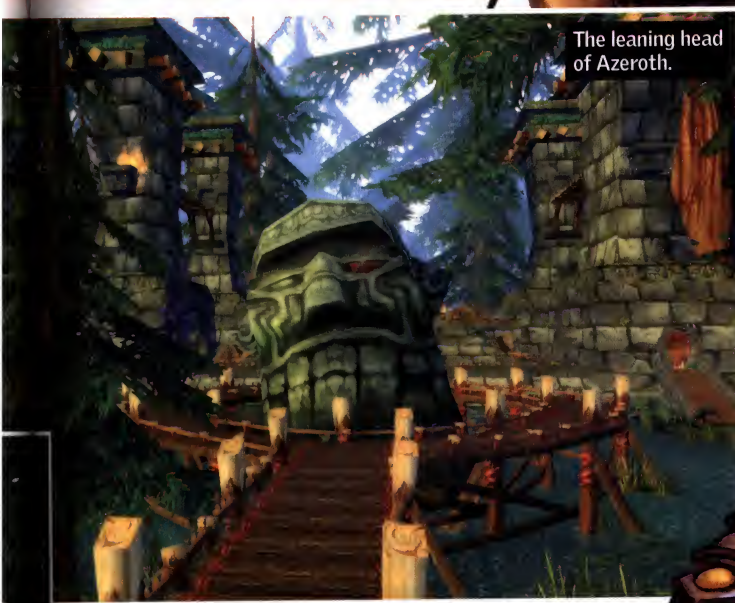


or two – especially with the several Elite troll-killing quests now being soloable.

Battlegrounds and PvP were also established and expanded a few months past release, with the Arathi Basin, Warsong Gulch and Alterac Valley battlegrounds allowing players to war with each other from level 10 up. This was later expanded into Battlegrounds, with players from different realms tearing each other apart and gaining honour, which can be turned in for special armour and weaponry.

Between Tuesdays and Thursdays, Blizzard also introduced Holidays, rewarding victories in a rotating set of

"World of Warcraft has ticked all the right boxes, and really tried to forge the link between the heart and head"
93% – PC ZONE # 152, March 2005



The leaning head of Azeroth.

battles (including those from the expansions) with cash and reputation rewards. This was very effective in retaining the 70 crowd prior to the release of *Wrath of the Lich King* at the end of 2008, alongside daily quests that intertwined with the heroic (ie much harder) dungeon quests.

Players are allowed to complete 25 daily quests a day, with each one giving a certain amount of money and Badges of Justice, which can then be turned in for higher-level equipment. This allows non-raiders to gear themselves up without having to guild up. The badges aren't totally limited to the heroic dungeons, with some rewarding you with gold and reputation for normal dungeon-crawling, but badges are available only for the top-tier grinders. There are even cooking and bombing quests throughout Outland and

Northrend that reward you with faction-related currency to cash in for special gear.

We reviewed *Wrath of the Lich King* recently, and made a point we're repeating again: *WOW* has become the *FIFA* of the MMO world. There isn't much innovation, but it is one of the slickest, consistently playable games out there. There's little danger that servers are going to be downsized (in fact, you'll have to queue to get on the popular servers) and we predict that there'll be a two more expansions in *WOW*'s lifetime – more if subscriptions continue to rise above 11 million.

The question you want to ask yourself is how much grinding you can take. While *The Burning Crusade* was an original, fun-packed expansion, *Wrath of the Lich King* repeated the 'kill this, do

We still would...

that' mentality without much that was new. If you stopped playing after *Crusade*, you'll most likely return to find you're playing much similar content. Unless you can scrape up a group of 10 people, *World of Warcraft* isn't stunningly different to how it was two, or even four years ago – it's just a lot slicker and a lot easier to get into. **PC7**

VERDICT

We'd still recommend it to new players, as it's well-made and undeniably addictive, but if you've taken less than a year's break from the game, there's not a great deal that's changed – for better or worse. **Ed Zitron**

THE STORY SO FAR... SANDS OF TIME

HOW *WOW* HAS PROGRESSED FROM BETA TO PATCH 3.0



0.6 THE RESTING

Rest experience is introduced to the *WOW* beta, to angry cries that the game has become far too difficult for the casual folk, regardless of how much Blizzard explained nothing had changed.

0.12 THE DURABLE PATCH

To yet more belligerent forum posts, Blizzard introduces a small-scale death penalty. Each item gained a durability statistic that slowly ticked down as you got damaged or died. The casual players were displeased.



1.5 BATTLEFIELD AZEROTH

The Capture the Flag PvP-driven Warsong Gulch and NPC Warfield Alterac Valley are added to *WOW* some months after they were promised (ie on release).

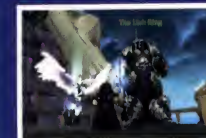
1.9 YA BUGGIN' ME

Blizzard starts the massive, realm-wide war effort to open the two new Ahr'Qiraj raid-dungeons. Even younger players can contribute by handing in different kinds of cloth to quest vendors around the capital cities.



2.3 BE MY QUEST

Blizzard tweaks the levelling curve between 30 and 60, lowering the amount of experience needed to level, and raising the amount given by quests, as well as adding extra quests to zones all around Azeroth – especially in Dustwallow Marsh.



3.0.8 WANDERING KNIGHTS

Blizzard allows the creation of a Death Knight on any realm once you've reached level 55 – on any character, on any server – allowing you to effectively migrate (if you're willing to play a Death Knight and own *Wrath of the Lich King*) at any time.

BUDGET

David Brown will do anything for budget games, including beating a tramp to death

STRONG BAD'S COOL GAME FOR ATTRACTIVE PEOPLE: SEASON 1

PUBLISHER Steam WEBSITE steampowered.com PRICE £18.99

STRONG BAD IS a character and a game series that will appeal to some and bemuse others. To devotees, it's gloriously funny and superbly irreverent. To others, it is the most hideous kind of internet so-called humour ever devised, apart from Rick Rolling (never a cause for us to split our sides in mirth).

Telltale's adaptations of the Homestar Runner universe have been universally accepted as "pretty great" by fans and almost universally ignored by non-fans. The visuals are built to keep the feel of the original web comics and also to fit

into the tiny memory space of the Nintendo Wii.

The humour hits all the right spots for the fans, while the puzzles are a mixed bag, getting easier as the season runs on. However, it isn't necessarily a problem that the puzzles are easy, as to make them tough would spoil the games' flow, one of the main reasons the series is fun to play.

Sadly, things end on a relatively sour note, without any big *Sam & Max*-style send-off or climax. There isn't even a



song! In the end, it is definitely up there on a par with Telltale's *Sam & Max* games, but only if you're of the right mind-set to enjoy the humour.



THIS MONTH PCZONE SAVED MONEY BY...

Ali washed her dishes in used bath water.

Saving: **£5.31**



Dave found a good deal on 5.1 speakers, saving his ears from 2.1 hell.

Saving: **£10**



Steve bought expensive consumer electronics, and so saved the global economy.

Saving: **\$900billion**

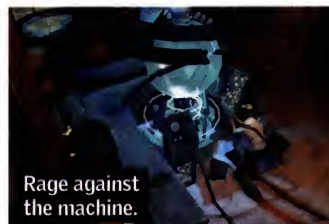


BROKEN SWORD 3: THE SLEEPING DRAGON

PUBLISHER Good Old Games WEBSITE gog.com PRICE \$5.99 (about £4)

GEORGE AND NICO'S adventures (which you can read more about on page 98) have been one of the major forces in adventure game history, and this is probably the third best of the four official games. Not that it's bad, far from it – it just had a fixation with its newly found third dimension. But if you like stacking or sliding boxes around in otherwise interesting locations, you'll love *Broken Sword 3*.

For us sane people, the box-shoving puzzles were like having a rotten tooth pulled, but with the dentist making an error and extracting a perfectly healthy one accidentally. Other than that, the story is solid, the graphics are still



pleasing on the eye and Nico is still smouldering. George still does his best Bertie Wooster impression, but he's a bit more action-oriented. All in all, a good entry to a well-loved series. Can we have *Broken Sword 5* soon, please?



NBA LIVE 06

PUBLISHER Mastertronic WEBSITE mastertronic.com
PRICE £4.88



LeBron goes up for a dunk.



REGULAR READERS (AND if you aren't one, why not?) will know I gave *NBA 2K9* a very high score, only not granting it classic status because of some control issues. That was the first time I'd played one of the 2K Sports *NBA* games, having previously stuck with EA's *NBA Live*

franchise. What a fool I was. Granted I had fun, but since I've crossed over, I realise just how flawed EA's products are.

Having said that, if you're prepared to live with the outdated rosters and team ratings, this will be good enough to fill a basketball-shaped hole in your soul.

As with most games in the *Live* series, it's tough to get to grips with, but once you have you'll never lose – unless the computer cheats and buries 99% of its shots.

Get it if you own a system incapable of running *NBA 2K9*.

PCZONE
69

SIMON THE SORCERER 3D

PUBLISHER Good Old Games WEBSITE gog.com PRICE \$5.99 (about £4)

I LOVE THE idea of Good Old Games, and CD Projekt are to be slapped on the back with a hearty bellow of congratulation for coming up with the idea and implementing it so well. But if GOG is going to live up to its name, it should only put out good games.

This is opinion, but even when it was released, people vomited in stores when attempting to hand back their copies of this heinous game.

To go from the Chris Barrie-inspired brilliance of the first game to this faecal horror of a title just makes my brain melt through my ears. The fact that even the very latest *Simon* title is better than this, and that was arse too, says so much about this scab of a game.

Avoid like it was rushing you in a dark alley, naked and brandishing a huge ribbed dildo.

PCZONE
3



And the rest...

The other cheap releases out now



NHL 06
£4.88, Mastertronic
The *NHL* ice hockey games are fun. Pity they've been virtually identical for the past five years.

PCZONE
67



MADDEN NFL 06
£4.88, Mastertronic
The *Madden* games are as close as we've come to enjoying American Football.

PCZONE
68



CRICKET 2004
£4.88, Mastertronic
The *Brian Lara* games are better than this (full) toss, so don't be a gooly, get one of them instead.

PCZONE
37

PCZONE Top 5 budget games



ROME: TOTAL WAR – GOLD EDITION II

PRICE £15, SEGA

This is huge-scale RTS warfare at its very finest. Imagine thousands of people hacking each other to shit and back.



FAR CRY

PRICE £5, Sold Out

With *Far Cry 2* out it's time for the rock-hard original to take the spotlight again. The second-best FPS ever made.



THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND

PRICE £5, Mastertronic

If RPG is your favourite genre, you could do a lot worse (or, in *Oblivion*'s case, slightly worse) than this epic, sprawling classic.



PSYCHONAUTS

PRICE £10, Steam

Here's Tim Schafer's psychological platform adventure. You won't have more fun until *Brütal Legend* comes out. If it ever does.



SID MEIER'S PIRATES!

PRICE £5, Sold Out

That's all the genres covered, isn't it? RTS, FPS, RPG, platformer and pirate. Yep, that's really everything.

BUYER'S GUIDE

Don't stop buying them until they're bought



PCZONE Top 5 IN-GAME ACTORS

- 1 DAVID WARNER**
(Jon Irenicus, *Baldur's Gate II*)
- 2 LANCE HENRIKSEN**
(Dacher, *Assault on Dark Athena*)
- 3 NEIL PATRICK HARRIS**
(DJ Veteran Child, *Saints Row 2*)
- 4 LEONARD NIMOY**
(Narrator, *Civilization IV*)
- 5 MARK HAMILL**
(Joker, *Arkham Asylum*)



PCZONE Top 5 UN-PC PC GAMES

- 1 ETHNIC CLEANSING**
(Direct from the Ku Klux Klan!)
- 2 GRAND THEFT AUTO**
(Do we really need to explain why?)
- 3 MUSLIM MASSACRE**
(Kill Muslims because they're Muslim!)
- 4 THE WITCHER**
(Pornographic trading cards)
- 5 MASS EFFECT**
(Lesbians in Space!)



PCZONE Top 5 PLANES, TRAINS AND AUTOMOBILES

- 1 STREET HAWK**
(*Street Hawk*)
- 2 X-WINGS**
(*Star Wars: X-Wing*)
- 3 DARKWALKER**
(*Unreal Tournament 3*)
- 4 WARTHOG**
(*Halo*)
- 5 KITT**
(*Knight Rider - The Game*)



FPS

Must buy!



HALF-LIFE 2 + EPISODES
PCZ Issues: 148 (97%), 170 (91%), 187 (82%)
Excelling in terms of action, storyline, emotion and ingenious set pieces, the continuing adventures of Gordon Freeman have yet to be equalled. Yes, a moderate amount of the action has faded through repetition by the time the episodes kick in, but with its Combine-defying freedom fighting, this is still the most finely crafted shooter experience ever released on PC. Gordon's alive, and long may he remain so.



LEFT 4 DEAD
PCZ Issue: 202 - 93%
The only thing the PCZ staff enjoys more than shooting zombies is shooting zombies as a team. And that's what *L4D* has - endless killing of mindlessly murderous plague victims, while you chortle and scream with your buddies.



TEAM FORTRESS 2
PCZ Issue: 187 - 93%
Beautifully balanced and engaging, Valve's update of the classic mod is a triumph, bringing together everything that's good about online shooters and topping it all off with superb animation that rivals the best Pixar's films.



CRYSIS WARHEAD
PCZ Issue: 199 - 92%
The standalone expansion may only take a few hours to complete, but it reins in the harsh system demands of the original, and contains a few moments of fantastic action storytelling, and improved alien AI.



FAR CRY 2
PCZ Issue 201 - 90%
A triumph of non-linear gameplay, *Far Cry 2* offers an astounding chunk of Africa in which to play with guns, flames and explosions. The residents are too tenacious, but in a world this well-realised, you won't care.



CALL OF DUTY 4: MODERN WARFARE
PCZ Issue: 188 - 89%
Big, brash and extremely loud, Infinity Ward's latest ultra-intense shooter offers some strikingly original military action. With superb multiplayer in tow, it's often an utter delight to play.



BIOSHOCK
PCZ Issue: 185 - 96%
The pson of *System Shock 2*, *BioShock* will suck you right into its intricate, art deco world. A destroyed Utopia under the sea, terrifying characters and emergent combat make this an unmissable experience.

Strategy

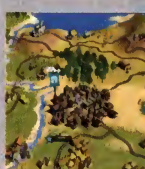
Must buy!



COMPANY OF HEROES
PCZ Issue: 173 - 93%
Despite hailing from that most overpopulated of genres, the WWII RTS, *Company of Heroes* is still number one is a testament to how utterly refined and slick it is. Relic have taken the best bits from strategy games and stripped out the crap, leaving you with a game that's fun, intelligent, accessible, taxing, tactical and exciting. And with so many positives in one sentence, you know it must be good.



WORLD IN CONFLICT
PCZ Issue: 186 - 92%
A stunning RTS set at the height of the Cold War, offering innovative online play, a solid single-player campaign, jaw-dropping graphics and the best nuclear blast you've seen.



CIVILIZATION IV
PCZ Issue: 162 - 92%
A Buyer's Guide without a *Civ* game would be a sorry place, and the latest version is the greatest yet. Now with added warmongering and diplomacy thanks to the expansion packs.



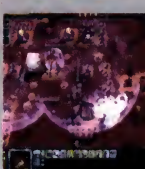
SINS OF A SOLAR EMPIRE
PCZ Issue 193 - 91%
This startling beauty came from nowhere, and quickly converted us from indifferent idiots into grateful idiots by surprising us with accessible complexity.



MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR
PCZ Issue: 175 - 91%
A blend of maniacal plotting on the strategic map and cheering with delight as your warriors collide spectacularly with your opponents' armies. Middle Ages war fun.



RISE OF NATIONS: RISE OF LEGENDS
PCZ Issue: 168 - 91%
Takes the great gameplay of *RON*, improves on it with elements from *Civ IV* and wraps the whole lot in a gorgeous sci-fi setting. An RTS bursting with innovation.



SUPREME COMMANDER
PCZ Issue: 179 - 88%
Huge battles of thousands of air, sea and land units? Giant stompy robots and a superb tactical map? One of the most original RTS titles around? Check, check and check.

Action/Adventure

Must buy!



GRAND THEFT AUTO IV
PCZ Issue: 203 - 91%
We PC users have had to wait a while before we could return to Liberty City with Niko Bellic, but the delay has been worth it. This version of *GTA4* adds graphics that are a cut above those on consoles, expanded multiplayer modes, and an exclusive video editor to Liberty City's free-roaming world and the sure-to-be-classic storyline of Bellic's American dream becoming an American nightmare.



MAX PAYNE 2: THE FALL OF MAX PAYNE
PCZ Issue: 136 - 93%
Showing its wrinkles a bit now, but it shows how to do bullet-time right. Noirish tone, a growling voice-over and remarkable gun action mean that Payne is still a force to contend with.



GEARS OF WAR
PCZ Issue: 188 - 90%
GOW's tactical battles and toughness make you fear the bullets flying around you. With the climatic Brumak battle, the PC has the best version of this excellent shooter. Shame we'll never see *GOW2*.



FAHRENHEIT
PCZ Issue: 159 - 90%
Murder most foul, and you're the killer. Boasts a twisting, turning, brilliantly told story, featuring multiple character control, split-screen tension, branching scenes and several endings. From the brains behind *The Nomad Soul*.



PSYCHONAUTS
PCZ Issue: 156 - 90%
Clever, witty, impeccably detailed and absolutely off its rocker - *Psychonauts* is proof that the anarchic edge of LucasArts hasn't completely left us. A slightly flawed game in some respects, but still a dazzling feat.



BEYOND GOOD & EVIL
PCZ Issue: 138 - 89%
We heap praise on this game on a monthly basis, but it's for a reason. Michel Ancel's superb journey through the strange land of Hillis is nothing short of storytelling magic. It's cheap now, so go out and buy it.



DEVIL MAY CRY 4
PCZ Issue 197 - 82%
Best played on a pad - but entirely comfortable on the keyboard - this is long hours of insane hack 'n' slash action and doolally cutscenes. Expect huge boss fights and an exhilarating slog through massive crowds of demons.

MMOs

Must buy!



WORLD OF WARCRAFT
PCZ Issue: 152 - 95%
Blizzard's recreation of Azeroth doesn't disappoint. Beautiful to watch, absorbing to play and with more content than you can shake a magic stick at.



LOTR ONLINE
PCZ Issue: 182 - 87%
A near-perfect recreation of Tolkien's tales, with solid combat and engaging plots, in a tasty MMO bundle. Meet Gandalf! Play as a hobbit or a spider! Middle-earth awaits...



WARHAMMER ONLINE
PCZ Issue: 200 - 92%
Mythic slips *Warhammer* into their realm vs realm template. Even the most reluctant PvP'er will launch themselves into huge open warfare scenarios. Brilliant.



GUILD WARS
PCZ Issue: 156 - 94%
How to make a gaming accessible to the masses. A lot of thought has been applied, and there are no subscription fees. Newbies can feel at home, thanks to a totally skills-based setup.



EVE ONLINE
PCZ Issue: 130 - 88%
Elite online has been a long-held fantasy, and this space sim has come the closest yet to making it a reality. A slow pace belies the options on offer, from mining to trading to piracy.

Simulation

BUDGET



X2: REUNION
PCZ Issue: 162 - 92%
Finally, a space sim to better *X2: The Threat*, and it just happens to be the sequel. This is possibly the best-looking game ever to appear on a PC. Oh, and it plays pretty well to boot. Why not get reunited?



IL-2 STURMOVIK: FORGOTTEN BATTLES
PCZ Issue: 128 - 92%
While flight sims are getting rarer and rarer, at least the quality remains high. None are more impressive than this ultra-classy WWII combat sim. Chocks away, comrade!



MICROSOFT FLIGHT SIMULATOR X
PCZ Issue: 175 - 89%
This latest iteration in the *Microsoft Flight Sim* series is the biggest since they started using actual polygons. What's more, the visuals may just sear your eyeballs.



FREELANCER
PCZ Issue: 128 - 84%
If *X2* is too slow for you, *Freelancer* should fit the bill. Plenty of trading, bounty-hunting and space piracy, but with the emphasis on action rather than realism. Space has never been this much fun.



SILENT HUNTER 4: WOLVES OF THE PACIFIC
PCZ Issue: 181 - 82%
If a life beneath the waves tickles your fancy, then this submarine simulator fits the bill. Tactics, torpedoes, sonar and sailors combine to make the ultimate ship-sinker.

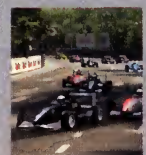
Driving/Racing



GTR2
PCZ Issue: 173 - 92%
Pick up this scarily realistic driving sim and race the car of your dreams. It comes with an improved driving model, new game modes and many other improvements.



RACE DRIVER: GRID
PCZ Issue: 195 - 88%
Codemasters moves the series from its historical simulation roots, strips off the *TOCA* and creates a Hollywood-realistic game with plenty of play modes and global challenges.



LIVE FOR SPEED
PCZ Issue: 158 - 90%
Online racing at its best. *LFS* has realistic handling, hilarious crashes and a racing community second to none. A remarkable achievement by such a small and talented team.



COLIN MCRAE: DIRT
PCZ Issue: 183 - 88%
This time the rallying legend treats us to a host of other off-road events, an excitable Travis Pastrana and some of the best-looking graphics to grace any driving game on PC.



GT LEGENDS
PCZ Issue: 161 - 92%
While *GTR* takes care of modern-day racing, *GT Legends*, a successor to *Grand Prix Legends*, does the business for historical driving. It's like the swinging '60s never ended.

Oddball

Must buy!



SPORE
PCZ Issue: 199 - 95%
This is four charming mini-games and an excellent space strategy game, glued together with a bunch of creation kits. It's also a beautiful one-off that is so well-realised that you should experience it yourself.



WORLD OF GOO
PCZ Issue: 201 - 90%
A stroke of indie genius, *World of Goo* is a puzzler in which you erect fantastic goo-based structures across a myriad of unique and intriguing levels. Novel at every turn, *World of Goo* is simply irresistible.



PORTAL
PCZ Issue: 187 - 89%
Ingenious and absurdly funny, *Portal* is a four-hour slice of perfect puzzles and discovery. Hurling yourself through floors and walls sounds odd, but modern games are rarely more delightful.



GARRY'S MOD
PCZ Issue: 179 - 88%
The god game-like *Garry's Mod* gives you the tools to create almost anything you can think of in the *Source* engine, from working robots to saucy ragdoll JPEGs. Fun and easy to use, try it out and see for yourself.



VIVA PIÑATA
PCZ Issue: 190 - 85%
Madder than a mercury-blooded clown, *Viva Piñata* looks simple but is a ridiculously addictive animal-raising sandbox game. Don't be put off by the kiddie-looking graphics - it's a keeper.

Sport



FOOTBALL MANAGER 2009
PCZ Issue: 202 - 90%
Another season passes and another *Football Manager* appears. This time a 3D match engine and dealing with PRs and the media are new to this addictive football manager sim.



PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 2008
PCZ Issue: 188 - 87%
Still in a different league to *FIFA*, *PES* lacks the official stamp but offers amazingly lifelike football. Whether it's end-to-end stuff or a nil-nil slog, it's always compelling.



NBA 2K9
PCZ Issue: 203 - 87%
Basketball will never be as popular as football in the sports games stakes, but *NBA 2K9* deserves to be played. This is a superb recreation of America's second-favourite sport that won't disappoint on any front.



FIFA 08
PCZ Issue: 188 - 80%
A veritable compendium of all that is football, and a good sports game too, the recent *FIFA* still lags behind *PES*, but benefits from layers of EA spit and polish. A decent variant of the beautiful game.



NHL 08
PCZ Issue: 187 - 80%
Bringing the American sport we 'get' (it's like *Speedball!*) to our PCs, the latest *NHL* is chock-full of large Canadians knocking seven bells out of each other. Exciting, fast, smooth and exhilarating.

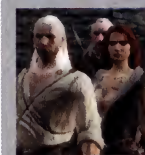
Role-playing games



THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION
PCZ Issue: 167 - 95%
Oblivion's sublime graphics, intuitive character-creation and massive freeform gameplay put paid to the myth that you have to own a beard to enjoy RPGs.



MASS EFFECT
PCZ Issue: 195 - 92%
Possibly BioWare's best game since *KOTOR*, with a new combat system that makes it feel a bit less RPG. Great story, fine action, brilliant dialogue and space sex - it's a modern must.



THE WITCHER
PCZ Issue: 188 - 88%
Adult and intelligent, the world of *The Witcher* is as fascinating as it is violent and corrupt. With moral bite and an epic story, this has come out of nowhere to revive an ailing genre.



THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND
PCZ Issue: 116 - 94%
This could be the most intimidating, yet wonderful, game we've ever played - the breadth and depth of *Morrowind* remains a remarkable achievement.



DEUS EX
PCZ Issue: 93 - 94%
This is the benchmark in FPS RPGs. A twisting plot, exciting freeform levels and some moments of pure exhilaration and drama ensure *Deus Ex* remains the alpha male of gaming.

INCOMING!

All approximate monthly dates are correct at the time of going to press

March

BATTLEFORGE	EA
C&C: RED ALERT 3 - UPRISING	EA
EMPIRE: TOTAL WAR	SEGA
SPORE: GALACTIC ADVENTURES	EA
TOM CLANCY'S HAWX	UBISOFT
WHEELMAN	MIDWAY

April

ARMA II	505 GAMES
COMPANY OF HEROES: TALES OF VALOR	THQ
OPERATION FLASHPOINT 2: DRAGON RISING	CODEMASTERS
VELVET ASSASSIN	GAMECOCK
WHITE GOLD	DEEP SHADOWS

TBC

ALPHA PROTOCOL	SEGA
ASSASSIN'S CREED 2	UBISOFT
BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM	EIDOS
BIOSHOCK 2: SEA OF DREAMS	2K
BURNOUT PARADISE	EA
CHAMPIONS ONLINE	2K GAMES
DC UNIVERSE ONLINE	SONY ONLINE
DEUS EX 3	EIDOS
DIABLO III	BLIZZARD
DRAGON AGE: ORIGINS	EA
MAFIA II	2K GAMES
SINGULARITY	ACTIVISION
THE SIMS 3	EA
STARCRRAFT II (three of them)	BLIZZARD
STAR TREK ONLINE	TBA
STAR WARS: THE OLD REPUBLIC	EA/LUCASARTS

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WORLD'S FIRST REVIEW

EMPIRE TOTAL WAR[™]

WORLDS BEYOND WARCRAFT WINDO
DRAGON AGE: ORIGINS GTA IV MOVIE-MAK



PLUS THE BEST FEATURES

WINDOWS 7 TESTED > FEAR 2 REVIEWED > DRAGON AGE: ORIGINS >
WORLDS BEYOND WARCRAFT > GTA IV MOVIE-MAKING TIPS > SPORE EXPANDS

NEW ISSUE ON SALE **NOW**

PCZONE HARDWARE

Better gaming through technology

Desktop love

OCCASIONALLY I NEED to relocate one or more of my PCs. While I'm thudding cases into door frames and tugging the wires of knotted peripherals, I stop for a moment, stare blankly at the carpet, and make a wish for the laptop fairy to bring me something several magnitudes less annoying.

Those of you who have read this column of nonsense since I started writing it will know that every February I start pining for notebooks. The house might be heaving with leftover Christmas junk, damp smelling coats, coffee creams and orphaned gloves, but the parade of desktops in my spare room remain the biggest eyesore.

There are cases on things and cases under things. There are cables, screens, speakers, mice and their pads, and keyboards everywhere. The room looks like a branch of Dixons 10 minutes after an earthquake.

Thing is, after I've given up the desktops there will be no going back. The space they once occupied will be instantly repossessed by other items, and once I've become used to reading email whilst on the bog, or browsing TV listings from the most comfortable corner of the sofa, everything else will seem arcane.

But it's not going to happen. Had I bought a laptop this time last year, I wouldn't be able to run *GTA* at a decent resolution and I wouldn't have been able to see the beauty of *Half-Life 2's Cinematic Mod* (page 94). Go on, give your desktop a hug.

Handy

Phil Wand, hardware editor

VENOM FOR PHENOM

AMD come up with the power to meet Core 2 head-on in games



LOOKING LONGINGLY AT Intel's Core 2 Quad? The Phenom II X4 920 and X4 940 processors are a decent stride forward for AMD in terms of what they do best: performance, power consumption, and value.

While the new quad core Phenoms won't be a serious challenge to the Core i7, they're a significantly cheaper route into modern gaming.

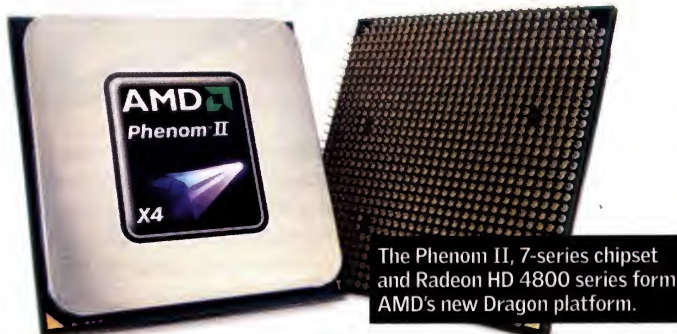
Whereas i7 as a platform remains prohibitive in terms of motherboard, CPU and DDR3 memory cost, the 920 is available for £200 and the 940 for less than £250. A decent AM2+ compatible 780/790 chipset motherboard needn't cost you more than £65, and 4GB DDR2 RAM should leave you change from £40.

What you get in return for your thrift is performance that'll meet or exceed a

Core i7 Q9650-based system, and which blows Intel's entry level Duos out of the water. AMD's bigger 940 can even match the Core 2 Quad QX9770 Extreme, and that's no mean feat.

The only question is, who at AMD chose 920 and 940 for the names of these processors? It's confusing – if not downright disingenuous – of AMD to use these when Intel launched their i7 with exactly the same numbers in November of last year.

amd.com



The Phenom II, 7-series chipset and Radeon HD 4800 series form AMD's new Dragon platform.

RICHER SOUNDS High-end surround sound for PCs

Described as Europe's leading direct seller of loudspeaker systems, with the largest range of THX loudspeakers anywhere in the world, Teufel are a German manufacturer nobody's heard of.



Their Theater 10 THX Ultra 2 is a capable of flattening you with its powerful 450W of premium quality sound, but its £5,880 price tag will leave bigger bruises.

The newly released Motiv 5 is built using the same quality components to the same uncompromising standards, and while £469 makes it look expensive alongside Logitech's Z-5500s, it's still cheap for audiophile gear.

teufel.eu

The Motiv 5 gives joy to audiophiles.

News round-up

Vista Service Pack 2 has slipped again. Microsoft promise that it'll be available in the second quarter of this year, but nothing firmer than that. The company have always said that the release date will be based on feedback from the beta programs, of which I'm not a member. After three tries, I've been unable to install *SP1* on my Dell without it blue screening. microsoft.com

We reported last month that there was a chance NVIDIA might release their monstrous GTX 295 at a price level to undercut the Radeon HD 4870 X2. But this never happened. In fact, the latter can be had for £375, whereas the former is nearer £450. We'd stick with the Radeon. amd.com

**WARNING:
THIS MONTH'S
HARD WORDS**
BY STEVE HOGARTY

SOLID STATE DRIVES: The organic food of the hard disk drive industry, these solid state drives are hand-fed from birth and bought primarily by middle-class suburbanites. **CORSAIR:** Really rough air that cuts up your throat when you try to breathe it in. Corsair is the unruly bedmate of global-warming, and is largely caused by people throwing away too many sharp objects like knives and staple-removers. **SPEDO:** An innovative new way of storing PC components by shoving them into your swimwear and then strutting around a swimming pool with CAT5 cables trailing behind you. **MOTIV:** Along with Means and Opportunity, one of three sets of speakers needed to give you 'suspect' status in a murder case.



DEAR WANDY

If it ain't broke, don't fix it. If it ain't working, don't panic...



PROBLEMS?

Mistook your wardrobe for the toilet again? Local shop stopped stocking your favourite blue-flavoured Pringles? Been playing *WOW* so long your partner's left you? We can't help with those setbacks (no, not even the Mighty Wandy), but we can solve all your hardware hassles. Wandy knows everything, and he's willing to help if you email him at: wandy@dearwandy.com, including as much info as you can and system specs where applicable.

Q POWER CRAZY

I'm looking to upgrade my power supply unit (PSU) as my current model doesn't have any SATA connections. I recently upgraded my processor, motherboard and RAM, and a new DVD drive which has a SATA connection. I need to replace the power supply before I scabble together the money to get your recommended card, the Sapphire HD 4850.

Problem is, I have no idea how much I should spend or what to spend it on! Your help would be great – any general recommendation would be good, though a specific recommendation would be amazing. I'm looking to spend around £50 at most (though again I have no idea how that rates up).

I currently have a Core 2 Duo processor and 2GB RAM. I don't know how to check my motherboard model without opening up my PC, unfortunately.

Will Hobson

A What you have inside your PC really doesn't require the miniaturised equivalent of Drax Power Station. Unless you are running multiple hard drives, multiple optical drives, an overclocked processor with overvolted RAM and two GeForce GTX 295 cards in SLI, the rule of thumb is that you should aim for a PSU of between 450W and 600W and which has 360W and 20A or more on its 12V rail.

How can you find that out? On the side of every PSU is a chart detailing how the power is split into what are known as rails. Look along the DC output line for one or more 12V entries, and underneath for the current and combined wattage. Double-check with your graphics card vendor to make sure they don't have specific requirements for the product you intend to buy – and you're done.

There was a recent thread on the Dear Wandy forums discussing power supplies that fall within your budget, and a number of products cropped up. The first was Corsair's 400W CX PSU, which is tremendous value at just £39 online. It provides you with six SATA

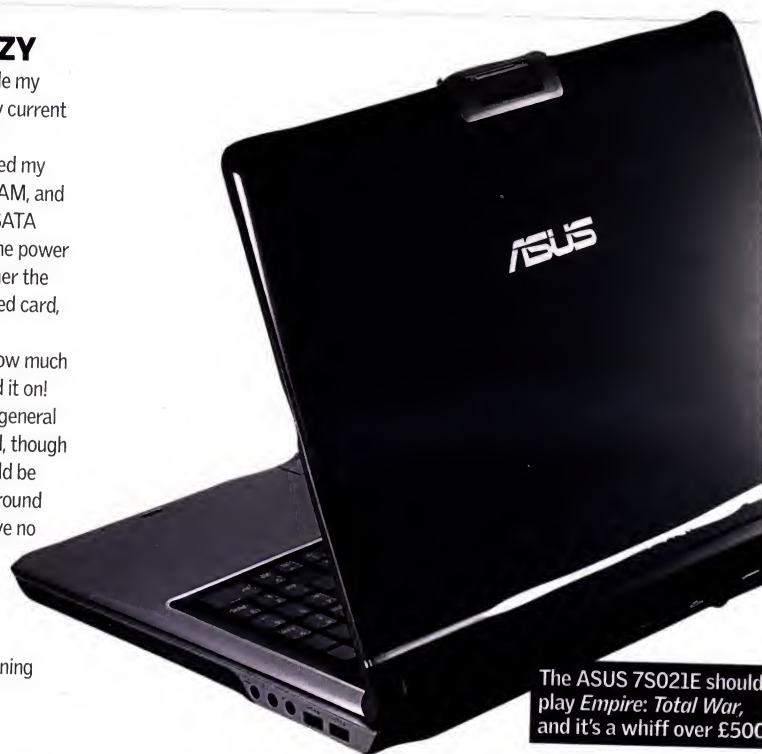
connectors in addition to six regular Molex connectors and a PCI-Express feed. It's also one of the few lesser priced models to get a 4+4 pin ATX12V connector – don't worry what this means, just understand that it makes the unit more compatible with a wider range of hardware.

The second was a PSU from the Seasonic S12 range, the 430W variants of which sail close to your budget. Just like Supermicro is my preferred manufacturer of motherboards, Seasonic is my favourite maker of PSUs. They're the only two hardware brands that have never once let me down.

Q HOT LAPTOP

I'm a PC ZONE subscriber and always enjoy your hardware section. I'm looking to buy a new gaming laptop for around £500 which will play the new *Empire: Total War* game.

There are plenty of £1,000 plus options out there, but that's too



The ASUS 75021E should play *Empire: Total War*, and it's a whiff over £500

expensive for me. Any suggestions what to buy and where from?

Dean Carey

A The best way to choose a laptop is to list out the components you want, and then visit *Insight* to choose it. The reason I mention *Insight* is that their advanced search engine is the best of any retailer online. You can narrow your choice by manufacturer, processor type and speed, RAM, storage, display resolution and size, weight and more. You can then drill down further to see which ones are in your price range and in stock.

What I did was choose Core 2 Duo, 2GHz to 3GHz, 2GB to 3GB RAM, 16.1-inch screen or above, and then selected your price range. There are three laptops – the ASUS X71SL 75020C, ASUS X71SL 75021E and Samsung R610 – that fit the bill at £533, £563 and £568 respectively. Out of those, the middle 75021E would be



Boring packaging, lacklustre design – but unbeatable quality.

DRIVER WATCH

GRAPHICS

MANU	DESC	RELEASED
ATI	CATALYST 8.12	10 DEC 08
NVIDIA	FORCEWARE 181.20	8 JAN 09

SOUND

MANU	DESC	RELEASED
CREATIVE	X-FI BETA 2.18.0004	30 JUL 08
CREATIVE	CREATIVE ALCHEMY 1.20.04	01 AUG 08
CREATIVE	AUDIGY BETA 2.18.0001	17 JUL 08

"The rule of thumb is you should aim for a PSU of between 450W and 600W, with 360W and 20A plus on its 12V rail"

"Price isn't everything – after-sale care, particularly on a laptop, is just as important"



It's not the quantum leap the Core 2 was, but i7 remains significantly fast.

my choice because it has a very slightly gutsier graphics card, a larger screen and Bluetooth.

As for where to buy it, see if your favourite retailer has it, or use a comparison tool such as Google Products (google.co.uk/products) to see who lists it cheapest. Just remember that price isn't everything – after-sale care, particularly on a laptop, is just as an important a consideration when buying.

Q E-BRILLIANT

A bit of praise for the guys at Ebuyer (ebuyer.com). My Freeagent 1TB external drive developed a fault and wouldn't boot up. I rang Ebuyer on a Tuesday and received an RMA number. They then picked the drive up (at no cost to me) on Wednesday and a brand-new replacement arrived the following week: a seven-day turnaround and no quibbles. First-class service!

Andy Smith

A Ebuyer used to be terrible in terms of stock levels, delivery, customer service and support. In the past 18 months the company have turned around, and are now a regular port of call for me when buying hardware online. Others I trust are Scan (scan.co.uk) and Insight (insight.com). And that any order over £49.99 can be delivered free is the icing on the cake.

Over the holiday period the company's Wandy rating went from 'great' to 'exceptional' when they extended their cut-off time for next-day delivery to 10pm. What I ordered late in the evening turned up in the morning as promised. Astounding stuff.

My only complaints are that they don't stock my favourite two hardware brands, Seasonic and Supercell, and many of their banner ads contain criminal levels of apostrophe abuse. "Save £££'s on selected TVs!" Ouch.

Q SHOPPING LIST

I've been toying with the idea of upgrading my current PC for a long time. It's starting to really lag behind on the newer games released, and I'm noticing the drop in frame rates even on low settings. Rather than upgrading, I've decided to do a complete overhaul of my system.

The majority of my PC is pretty outdated by now, but I have a new hard drive, DVD drive and sound card, so planned on keeping those. It's just the motherboard, CPU, PSU, memory and graphics card. I've got around £600 to play with, but I'm really stuck on what to actually buy. Any suggestions?

Lee Hewitt

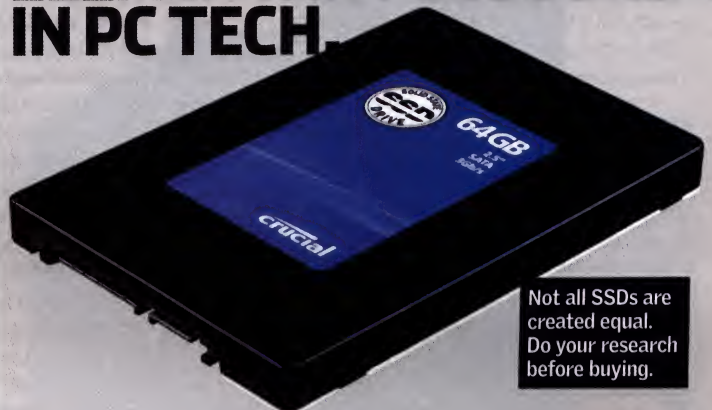
A If you can stretch to £650, I'd go for an Intel DX58SO

SmackOver (£240), Intel Core i7 920 (£240), 2GB PC3-10666 RAM (£50) and a Radeon HD 4850 (£100). The remainder I'd spend on that power supply you want, depending on whether your existing unit has the right output and connections (see Power Crazy on the left).

Q XP STALWART

I'm a long-time reader of PC ZONE, but a first-time writer. I'm planning to buy components for a kick-ass machine worth £1,200, but I think I've come across a snag.

ELEMENTARY LESSONS IN PC TECH.



Not all SSDs are created equal. Do your research before buying.

11 SOLID STATE DRIVES

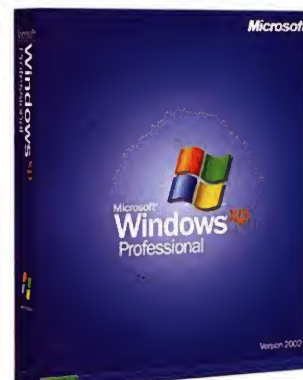
A new solid state drive (SSD) is what will eventually replace your hard disk drive (HDD).

Solid state refers to the fact that the drive has no mechanical parts and instead is comprised entirely of electronics. Because these drives work lack moving parts there's no startup time, no noise, and only a tiny delay when saving and reading files. An SSD can be many, many times faster than its equivalent HDD, and as technology improves, so will its incredible speed. To give you an idea of how this technology will

improve your computing experience, an SSD can snap your load times in half. Even big applications – such as Adobe Photoshop – will appear in two seconds rather than 10.

But the technology is still in its infancy, and with numerous SSD drive types available from Intel, Samsung and others, units can – in certain situations – end up slower than the hard disk drive you had already. And it's expensive mistake to pick the wrong SSD.

Our advice is to keep an eye on SSD advancements here in PC ZONE – and wait til summer before smashing the piggy bank!



DirectX 10 cards will still work perfectly well in Windows XP.

I want to get a GIGABYTE Radeon HD 4870 X2 card but am an XP user. Given that XP does not support DirectX 10, does this mean that I cannot use an X2 card at all?

Sam Naji

A The short answer is, you're fine. If you take a look at the minimum specifications for the fat-ass Raddy, you'll see that Microsoft Windows XP is listed. Your software will simply bypass the DirectX 10 features – and if you want my opinion, you'd be hard-pushed to tell the difference in quality anyway.

FORUMS:
DIRECT FROM
DEARWANDY.COM

(Sp@N) Is it the Sapphire version of the Radeon HD 4850 that's most worth getting? Second, since I have a motherboard with a PCI-E 2.0 slot, will the card definitely run? Not on my PC for a week or so and can't name the board yet. Does it make any difference that my PC was pre-built from a large retailer? (OneOne) In general, video cards are all the same, save for the design of the heatsink and any decals stuck on it. Compare the speeds of the GPU and RAM with other brands you're considering, and the price. (Gavpowell) As long as you have the slot for the card it makes no odds. (OneOne) The PCI-E slot for the video card should be the longest on the board, closest to the CPU and heatsink.

HOW WE TESTED

Here's what we looked for in these cases: well-designed interiors that let air flow freely; dust filters to keep the insides clean; low noise levels; high-quality building materials – preferably metal over plastic; and good value price-wise. Most importantly, we built a PC in each case to see how easy the task was, and whether the case held the components well together.



SPECIFICATION

Size: 58x63x24.3cm
Weight: 13.2kg
Type: Full tower ATX
Drive bays: 11
Fans: 4 (plus 3 optional)

COOLER MASTER ACTS 840

PRICE £185 **MANUFACTURER** Cooler Master **WEBSITE** coolermaster.com

A **SMALL CHILD** could sleep inside this featureless monolith undisturbed. On the specs sheet it looks narrower than and shorter than the Xaser below, but the sharp industrial design of the Cooler Master means it fills every millimetre of those measurements. Yet it's impressively light – coming in at 5kg less than the Xaser – which attests to the quality of the materials used.

Best of all, there's absolutely nothing fussy about the ACTS 840. No frippery, just clever design choices – like the easy-to-remove dust filters and motherboard tray. Its enormous internal width

ensures even the world's largest CPU coolers (also made by Cooler Master) will fit with room to spare, and everything is so accessible that putting a system together is the work of minutes, rather than hours.

Air is pumped around by a pair of near silent 230mm spinners in the top, rather than by vibration-prone door fans. An optional air duct helps chill 3D cards without adding to the noise levels.

There's incredible attention to detail: the front panel is hidden in a pop-up panel on the top, because a case this size has to sit by your feet. And it's immaculately engineered, gliding into place

without a sound. It seems odd to mention power and reset switches in a case review, but these are so good it's worth it.

Except for the price tag, it's hard to find fault with this case. Unless your job is guaranteed through the credit crunch – in other words you work somewhere in the debt collection industry, or you're a politician – right now the chances are you can't afford it.

“Except for the price tag, it's hard to find fault with this case”

PCZONE
91
A very cool Cooler Master



SPECIFICATION

Size: 60.5x25x66cm
Weight: 18kg
Type: Full tower ATX
Drive bays: 14
Fans: 3 (plus 3 optional)

XASER VI VG4000BNS

PRICE £113 **MANUFACTURER** Thermaltake **WEBSITE** uk.thermaltake.eu

THE XASER VI is awesomely tasteful. Despite being huge, it's not too heavy as the bodywork is mostly aluminium, and mostly not there. All of the red areas are perforated, presumably to keep the weight down. At first we thought this would interfere with air channelling. Yet this proved one of the best cases on test at holding temperatures down to a reasonable level.

The door catch for removing the sides is unnecessarily fussy, but once you've opened it, the interior is very well laid out. A removable motherboard tray lets you put

everything together on your desk without having to tilt and scratch the case, and the drive bays are neat, orderly and easy to access. The expansion card slots are tool-less as well.

Not everything is perfect though. The plastic fins also make life difficult. For one, the only place to pick the case up is by a spoiler that's so weak it has a sticker warning you not to use it as a handle. Then why have it instead of, say, a handle?

Also, while the lack of a side fan means that most CPU heatsinks should fit inside easily, we struggled

with giants like the latest Zalman Flower Cooler.

However, these are minor flaws that are easy to live with, in a high-quality case. It's the oldest design on test here, and the best.

PCZONE
92
Superior craftsmanship

PC CASE
SPECIAL!

Z-MACHINE GS1000

PRICE £127 MANUFACTURER Zalman
WEBSITE zalman.com

MOST OF WHAT you see here is glossy plastic. Not in itself a sign of evil doing, but it lacks a certain refinement. Once inside, things are much better.

The GS1000 is roomy, with a neat cabling system, an excellent PSU sliding mount and an unusual but helpful extra set of electronics for fitting hard drives. Alas, it's also too loud, given the competition at this price level.

SPECIFICATION

Size: 22x56x58cm
Weight: 12kg
Type: Full tower ATX
Drive bays: 10
Fans: 3 (plus 2 optional)

PCZONE
68



THREE HUNDRED

PRICE £45 MANUFACTURER Antec WEBSITE antec.com/uk

CHEAP IS RARELY as cheerful as this case. The unsophisticated design is staggeringly good value. Despite being fairly cramped there's

enough room for one large 3D card (although you'll struggle to kit it out with a super-huge card like the Radeon X2). And it has a few features you won't find on a chassis costing three times as much, such as variable-speed fans for cooling, washable air filters, and top-mounted USB and I/O ports.

SPECIFICATION

Size: 46x46.5x20.5cm
Weight: 7.2kg
Type: Midi-tower ATX
Drive bays: 9
Fans: 2 (plus 3 optional)

PCZONE
89



SPEDO

PRICE £126 MANUFACTURER Thermaltake WEBSITE uk.thermaltake.eu

THE SPEDO SUBDIVIDES itself into small plastic compartments to aid cooling, even covering most

of the motherboard area with fan-assisted blocks.

You'll see similar systems in PCs from Alienware or Dell, but they're more fuss than their worth in a self-build PC. Despite tricks such as a movable duct to channel air to the CPU or GPU, we'll stick with the quieter Xaser.

SPECIFICATION

Size: 53.6x23x61cm
Weight: 13kg
Type: Full tower ATX
Drive bays: 13
Fans: 5 (plus 3 optional)

PCZONE
67



P180 MINI

PRICE £74 MANUFACTURER Antec WEBSITE antec.com/uk

THE MINI IS designed specifically for micro-ATX boards. There's a lot of plastic here – ostensibly for silencing, the theory being vibrating plastic is quieter than vibrating aluminium – and it has

the rubbish door from the P180 rather than the solid one from the P190.

We're not fans of the chevron motif on top, either. The interior is beautifully laid out, though, with chambers for the PSU and drives to help keep them cool.

Overall, this is a clever but specialised case.

SPECIFICATION

Size: 51x28x51.5cm
Weight: 9.5kg
Type: Micro-ATX
Drive bays: 8
Fans: 2 (plus 3 optional)

PCZONE
81



REMEMBER:
PC MICE DO NOT
NEED CHEESE OR
THE RSPCA

If your mouse isn't working as well as it used to, using a piece of Cheddar to tempt it to work harder is pointless as it's not alive. For the same reason, the RSPCA won't visit if they hear you've slammed your mouse on your desk in a fit of gamer rage.

HARDWARE DIVIDE

We see plenty of new gear at **PC ZONE**, but these are the bits we just adore

LOADED?

GRAPHICS N280GTX

PRICE £420
MANUFACTURER MSI
msicomputer.co.uk

Fast graphics don't come cheap, and NVIDIA's 200-series flagship is reassuringly expensive. There are four power modes on offer, PhysX support, and a batting average better than any other. Plus there's 1GB DDR3 and many other enhancements that deliver performance around 1.5x faster than any predecessor. Can your credit card handle it?



PROCESSOR



CORE 2 QUAD EE QX9775

PRICE £1,000
MANUFACTURER Intel
intel.co.uk

A silly price makes for awesome power and magical performance. Not only will your Extreme Edition chip cost you the same as several entire PCs, but like everything else in your PC it'll be obsolete within two years. If you've got the money, go crazy and give your PC a hot rod CPU.

MOTHERBOARD



D975XBX2

PRICE £155
MANUFACTURER Intel
intel.co.uk

Everything we adored about our long-time fave D975XBX, only with a thick coat of overclocking goodness. Intel's flagship desktop product represents all that's good about their products: solid, reliable, no-nonsense and fast. Saddle up with a Core 2 Duo and away you go!

HDD



WD7500 AAKS

PRICE £109
MANUFACTURER Western Digital
wdc.com

Almost as fast as the 150GB Raptor, but with five times the capacity and half the noise. Products like the WD7500AAKS and Hitachi's Deskstar 7K1000 are now so quick that you don't need to spend extra on 10,000rpm drives. So don't.

SCREEN



SM226BW

PRICE £219
MANUFACTURER Samsung
samsung.com/uk
The Samsung SM226BW is

handsome and fast (it has a grey-to-grey refresh rate of just 2ms) and has no hint of the motion sickness that plagued LCDs just a few years ago. It produces a bright, evenly lit image that's full of reverberant colours, sharp edges and dark blacks.

SOUNDCARD



SOUND BLASTER X-FI FATALITY FPS

PRICE £130
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
uk.europe.creative.com

This is a slightly bonkers soundcard for audiophiles. With support for EAX 5.0 and 64MB X-RAM delivers top-quality sound effects in your games. CMSS-3D works magic on a stereo signal and makes headphone gaming crystal.

SPEAKERS



Z-5500

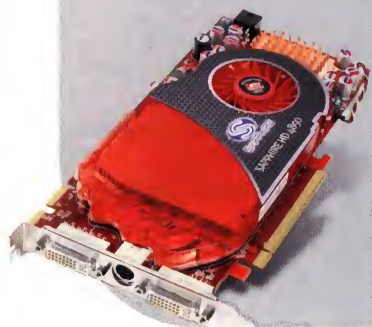
PRICE £195
MANUFACTURER Logitech
logitech.co.uk
The price has dropped below £200 and these

speakers are simply the best we've ever tested. The soundtracks from both games and movies ravish your ears, and you'll soon find yourself dusting off your old CDs just so you can sit in the middle of the sound and revel in it.

SKINT?

GRAPHICS HD4850

PRICE £145
MANUFACTURER Sapphire
www.sapphiretech.com
This is the card that had arch-rival NVIDIA slashing prices in an effort to be competitive. Just £140 buys you a mainstream monster with performance that matches a GeForce 9800 GTX and snaps at the heels of the new N280GTX. Put the magazine down and buy one.



PROCESSOR



CORE 2 DUO E2180

PRICE £55
MANUFACTURER Intel
intel.co.uk

At the budget end of things, it's a tough choice between the E2180, E4500 and E8200. Unsurprisingly, things get faster the more you pay, but the E2180 here is a flexible engine that's great for gentle gaming or an overclocking frenzy.

MOTHERBOARD



CONROEXFIRE- ESATA2

PRICE £60
MANUFACTURER ASRock
asrock.com

Paired with an E6300, this ASRock motherboard can wring high-end performance from a budget rig. It features a 1066/800/533MHz FSB, SATA II with RAID, 7.1 HD audio onboard, CrossFire support, Gigabit LAN and ASRock's easy overclocking features.

HDD



CAVIAR 1600AAJS SATA-II

PRICE £30
MANUFACTURER Western Digital
wdc.com

A 160GB hard drive remains more than enough for the casual gamer to do a spot of casual gaming. A few good titles, Steam, a couple of thousand music files and the odd porn flick still leaves plenty of room for Windows to manoeuvre.

SCREEN



VA903M

PRICE £118
MANUFACTURER ViewSonic
www.viewsonic.europa.com/uk
The VA903M is a

better bet than any of the similarly-priced widescreen variants as there are more pixels on its 19in screen: its 1280 x 1024 pixel panel offers greater depth than the standard 1440 x 900 panels of its peers.

SOUNDCARD



SOUND BLASTER AUDIGY 2 VALUE

PRICE £20
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
uk.europe.creative.com

The cheap Audigy features EAX 4.0 and Dolby Digital EX support. This card makes an awful lot of sense for casual gamers, as there's little point throwing half a mortgage payment at your soundcard.

SPEAKERS



X-530

PRICE £55
MANUFACTURER Logitech
logitech.co.uk
Logitech's X-530s have the edge on

quality and are available just about everywhere. This Swiss-designed 70W, 5.1 surround sound system offers Logitech build quality with superb sound in games, movies and music. And for £55 their value can't be beat.

Magazines
aren't for
reading...

they're for
reloading.



Get your ass kicked for free on the
mind-blowing jolt public servers or take complete
control with your own jolt clan server.

Take no prisoners. Accept no substitutes.
www.jolt.co.uk



PCZONE FREEPLAY



For the man who has nothing

It's me again – but is it?

WHILE IT MAY be my grotesque visage plastered above this column, I've been assisted by our New York-based chum Ed Zitron in compiling this month's bumper Freeplay section. We were going to do a photographic melding of our forms, but the results threatened to drive our art bods to the brink of madness.

We have the first English interview with the lads behind *Broken Sword 2.5*, an independent entry into the series' canon, fully sanctioned by Revolution Software. Adventure games, especially those of the past, are awesome, and perhaps my favourite genre ever. Certainly I'll always proudly pick *Monkey Island 2* as my number one game of all time, although the first *Doom* could very well tie it at the top.

The *Broken Sword* series is great as well (although the second one was a bit weak for my liking). You should really hate George Stobbart, but you can't help but grow attached to his character – like an American version of Bertie Wooster. So it's nice that Revolution have let their creation be used like this, something more than welcome in today's climate of paranoid companies preferring to let their beloved licences rot.

Anyway, read on for the best (and stupidest) in indie land this month, including the ultimate in came expanding experiences and a game named after disfiguring facial injuries. And there's the usual mods and stuff, in case you thought we'd forgotten about them. Never, I say!

David Brown,
Staff writer

RADIATION DAY

What, no
downloads?

WEBSITE fallout.bethsoft.com



Wish You Were Here
2277, presented by a
ghoul Judith Chalmers.

SO, THE FIRST *Fallout 3* patch is upon us, looming out of the radioactive mists like some giant looming thing. Bethesda claim it will deal with all the major (and a lot of the minor) issues that have been flagged up by players and testers around the world. Two of the more comedic errors that have been discovered relate to NPCs, who would either occasionally disappear from the game or be resurrected.

The patch is currently available on the official Bethesda site (linked above) although, when it was first released, some were annoyed it was only downloadable through Games for Windows Live and not manually. Still, that situation seems to have sorted itself out now, which is good.

Something Bethesda have been working on is making sure certain troublesome quest bugs have been eliminated. For example, they've removed

"several instances" where quest items would remain in the inventory, using up invaluable weight. Another quest that seemed to suffer from bugs was *The American Dream*, which could sometimes lock the player's control permanently while it was being attempted, plus there was a glitch where a player would be prevented from "accessing their belongings in the locker by the door if they left the room first".

Other changes include redefinable VATS and Pip Boy keys, quest objectives properly updating, some crashes cured here and there, NPCs inadvertently dying from falling, no getting stuck in the level-up menu if your skills are maxed out and, most importantly, fixing an issue with the haircut menu.

Perhaps the most amusing bug fix of this patch involved VATS. While some people reported they were getting stuck and unable to exit the combat system, the "fixed rare issue where player would fall through the floor while in VATS" problem brings back memories of *Hidden & Dangerous* and its off-hilarious scenery. In some ways, I wish I'd seen this glitch for myself.

Everyone's favourite
apocalyptic jolly boy.



PCZONE
FREE-O-METER



0
HOURS

*Approximate amount of completely free stuff this month



347
HOURS*

FREE TORTURE!

Savage 2 is yours for nothing! Well, kind of...

WEBSITE savage2.s2games.com

OVER THE PAST few months there have been a few older games released for free (or with a bit of advertising stuck in). Quality titles *The Suffering* and *Full Spectrum Warrior* are two of the most prominent examples of this outburst of developer generosity, and now the team at S2 Games have decided to release *Savage 2: A Tortured Soul* for no pounds, no pence.

Well, ish. While the game is freeware, there's a 'premium account' to expand various aspects of it. Still, for all intents and purposes, the game's out for now.

Savage 2 is an FPS/RPG/RTS that improves radically with the online multiplayer play. And as it's free, you shouldn't have trouble getting your mates playing as well.



CASHING IN

Plumbers, coins and hardcore platforming

WEBSITE retrosabotage.com/mario/golden.php



"Super Mario isn't a character you'd usually read about in PC ZONE. Yet this game is exclusive to PC"

YOU THOUGHT PRINCE of Persia (the first one) was the best platform game of all time? Or perhaps *Sonic the Hedgehog* on the Megadrive? Well, you were wrong. You've not come across Retro Sabotage's amazing new *Super Mario* game – not a character you'd usually read about in *PC ZONE*, yet this is exclusive to the PC! Take that, Nintendo! In your face, Bob Hoskins!

As with any *Mario* game, the objective is to get from the left side of the level to the right. It requires a great deal of jumping, so prepare your fingers for some S-key tapping mayhem!

Rumours Nintendo have started legal proceedings against the authors of this mod seem groundless. Whatever happens, we suspect people will soon abandon their cheap plastic toys (the Wii) and head back to the beige box of brilliance that is the PC.

SNIPPETS



TOP SPINNER

WEBSITE mousebreaker.com/games/topspinner

Yes, we've featured Foddy's cricket game before, but it's now available now on Mousebreaker.com under a different guise. Gone is the infinite ball score-fest, replaced by a 10-over romp. Score as many runs as possible from 60 deliveries.



I LIKE GOILS

WEBSITE fallout.bethsoft.com

The Writers Guild of America has nominated an indie game in its first Videogame Writing Award. *Dangerous High School Girls in Trouble* is described as a "social board game" by its developers Keith Nemitz and Adrianne Ambrose.

Bug Fix of the Month



THIS MONTH
S.T.A.L.K.E.R.:
CLEAR SKY PATCH
V1.5.03:

"Fixed the spontaneous launch of music"

MOVIE OF THE MONTH

FULL THROTTLE
What's this doing here? Well, on one of our regular scourings of the digital ether we call the internet, we came across this tantalising video that turns *Full Throttle* into a movie. Think of it as the perfect way to remember when LucasArts produced good games...



Ripburger hungers for power and he'll do anything to get it...



...like bashing his boss's head in with a metal bar!



Our hero Ben has to undergo many trials before he can save the day.



Then all he wants to do is ride the open roads, listening to Motörhead.

Demos

David Brown guides you through your free DVD

SAVAGE 2: A TORTURED SOUL

It's like a whole game for free... because it is!

WEBSITE savage2.s2games.com

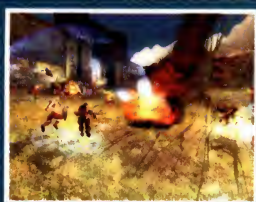
WE HERE AT ZONE like to think we're generous, so in that spirit, we present you with the full, whole, complete version of *Savage 2: A Tortured Soul*.

There are a few elements in a premium area which you have to pay for, but the vast majority of the release is for squat. As a game, it's what acronym-lovers have called an FPSRTSRPG, as it melds first-person shooter gameplay with real-time strategising and role-playing elements.

You take the role of a commander who controls a battlefield in a top-down RTS-style fashion, issuing orders to the other players on your team and setting objective targets for them to reach.

The rest of the team go into FPS mode and carry out said instructions. There's also some levelling up to do and so on.

Pretty much the whole game is free and we liked it when it came out, so you really have little excuse not to give it a go, unless you don't have a disc drive. In that case, exactly why are you reading these pages?



LILY SAVAGE

There's often a lot of stuff going on in *Savage 2*, so it's likely you'll be a little disoriented when you first start playing. Bear with it though, as it's worth persevering.



SAVATAGE

As the commander, you get a zoomed-out view of the game world, issuing orders to your team and deciding the strategic flow of the battles. You'll also get blamed if you lose.

MACHO MAN RANDY SAVAGE



SAVAGE GARDEN

The regular soldiers go into FPS mode to carry out the commander's plans. This is where the meat of the game is and actions here will determine how the battle goes.



ROBBIE SAVAGE

There are also RPG elements to the game, so you can upgrade various aspects of your team and characters. The game is surprisingly deep so if you get into it, you'll be there months.

PCZONE

ON THE DVD

Having problems getting something on our DVD to work? Phone our helpline on **01225 442244** and ask for cover disc support. Or email support@futurenet.co.uk, including as much information as possible about your system and the nature of your problem.

LEGENDARY

Like a modern version of Pandora's Box

WEBSITE legendarythegame.com

YOU MIGHT HAVE seen our review of this in issue 203, and you might also know that we thought *Legendary* sucked big balls (or was distinctly average if we're being polite). Anyway, we know that sometimes you disagree with us (why, we could never know) so here's the demo so you can make up your own mind.

You'll get to team up with some humans as they battle against the very mythical beasts you unleashed from opening Pandora's Box. Never mind, eh? At least you get to shoot them, which is the least you could ask for. You also get strange magical

powers which were granted to you after opening the box itself at the behest of an evil corporation/Dr Breen-style overlord. In fact, you might notice a few *Half-Life*-isms scattered about, though we won't tell you where. That'd spoil the fun. You never know, maybe you'll be more forgiving and enjoy it more than we did.



"Red sky at night, this game is shite."

FORGED IN BATTLE

Trade those cards like they were on fire

WEBSITE battleforge.com

TRADING CARD GAMES are (oddly) popular and online versions are getting increasingly important in the grand scheme of things.

This is EA's attempt to muscle in on this burgeoning market, with all the big fantasy barbarians; elven ladies with the same armour value as the men, even

though they only wear a tiny piece of cloth; and various beasts, creatures and monsters to battle.

Designed to be played with friends online, there is potential scope for grand strategies and devious tactical play to be employed against your enemies. Gotta collect 'em all!



1 AIR UNITS

Beware of attack from the skies, as these dragonfly/bird things can deal some serious damage.

2 ROCKY

This towering hulk reminds us of *Guild War's* Titans, although he looks tougher to kill.

3 REGULARS

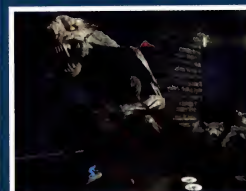
These guys will make up the bulk of your forces, being cheap, expendable and tiny compared to the other units.

MYTHICAL FOES



TOAD CREATURE

We're not entirely sure what this thing is, but it might be a toad mutant. Answers on a postcard...



WEREWOLVES

We don't know if this is an American Werewolf, but chances are it is.

BESTIAL!

Monsters await you



BIG LIZARDS

Dragons will abound, breathing flames all over your brave warriors. Well, what do you expect? It's a fantasy game!



BIG STATUES

This guy seems to be made of stone and could do some serious damage. We wonder if he listens to Monster Magnet...

BEST OF THE REST



What is on the pages opposite is not the whole of our cover disc's content. Here are the other demos and movies that you can enjoy. Or not, if that's your will.



CRYOSTASIS

WEBSITE cryostasis-game.com

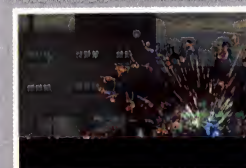
This is only be a tech demo, but it shows off how intriguing this Russian FPS might be. Definitely a potential sleeper hit for 2009, we're looking forward to freezing with it very soon.



JUTLAND

WEBSITE stormeaglestudios.com

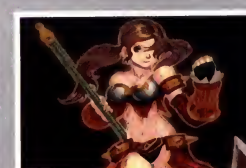
Simulations aren't common any more, so when one comes out with graphics more advanced than a pocket calculator's, you have to sit up and take notice. Maybe.



FACEWOUND

WEBSITE facewound.com

Zombies have never been more popular and this surprisingly overlooked side-scroller is as good as many proper games out there at the moment.



FIESTA ONLINE

WEBSITE fiesta-online.gamigo.com

Right, this isn't anything to do with the soft-core magazine of the same name - it's a cutesy-pie MMO with scantily clad elf women, pixies, fairies and those sort of things. But it's not porn... honestly.

HOT DOWNLOADS
PCZONE

COMBAT MISSION: SHOCK FORCE



snipurl.com/combatmission
The latest release in this series tries to take the franchise to a new level. Find out if it does by testing the game's basic mode and the Marines Module.

EMPIRE: TOTAL WAR MULTIPLAYER TRAILER



snipurl.com/empiremp
We're getting all historical at Zone Towers, as we prepare for the arrival of *Empire*. So here's a trailer, so you can be as excited as we are.

Freeware

Ed Zitron shakes his head and refuses to pay for another month



Freeware is so good at bringing you free games, so utterly fantastic at doing that which its namesake describes, that other publications'

freeware sections are ashamed to even be sold in the same newsagents. This month, shoot a huge amount of zombies – inside browsers and out; delve into the depths of randomly created cave systems and blow them up; and shoot a bunch of NES-style Nazis in another clone of *Wolfenstein*.



8-BIT KILLER

DEVELOPER Locomalito
WEBSITE snipurl.com/8bitkiller

IN AN HOMAGE to 8-bit gaming (or at least, that's what we can make out from the Spanish translation on the site) *8-Bit Killer* is *Wolfenstein 3D* if it was done on the first Nintendo. It stars some fantastic faux-anime character design and a toe-tapping plinky-plonk soundtrack, and for a lo-fi FPS it's got some clever ideas. Using a bizarre anime-style storyline, it justifies why you're fighting wall-bound skulls, blue men in gimp suits, and hiding behind trucks.

This involves running down a series of corridors, opening doors and shooting enemies that run at you to club your skull in or the ones that stand back and shoot at you. It gets even more complex as these enemies move and shoot at you. Sarcasm aside, *8-bit Killer* manages to keep things tense and challenging by trapping you with far too many bad guys, and harnessing the power of *Doom* and *Wolfenstein*'s breakneck running speed.

This retro romp is a well-made title, which could be better than the new *Wolfenstein*.

SPELUNKY

Who wants to play *Cave Explorer*?

DEVELOPER Derek Yu **WEBSITE** snipurl.com/spelunky

DEREK YU, CREATOR of indie hit *Aquaria* and owner of some of the finest hair in videogaming, has returned to freeware with panache. You may remember the procedurally generated games competition run by The Independent Gaming Source (tigsources.com) from a few months back; well, this is its natural elaboration, and it's yet another *Game Maker* classic. *Spelunky* is like Indiana Jones blended with *Dig Dug*, with a sprinkling of Mario and Roguelike.

Cooking analogies aside, *Spelunky* has you bouncing an adorable little man through an almost totally destructible environment. The goal is to get as much gold as possible without dying horribly. You pull this off by jumping large gaps, whipping enemies, and throwing bombs (which destroy any terrain that the explosion hits) to grab all of the treasure. You can also use ropes to navigate the caverns, which is useful considering the amount of times you're going to fall arse-over-tit into the depths.

One thing that everyone will notice is how difficult *Spelunky* is. Depending on how the level is generated, you will be pestered by any number of enemies.



These range from adorable little snakes and casually aggressive bats to spiders that are three times the size of you. While my arachnophobia may have made this a far bigger deal than I admit, these things seem to home in on your every move, and jump at an unnatural speed.

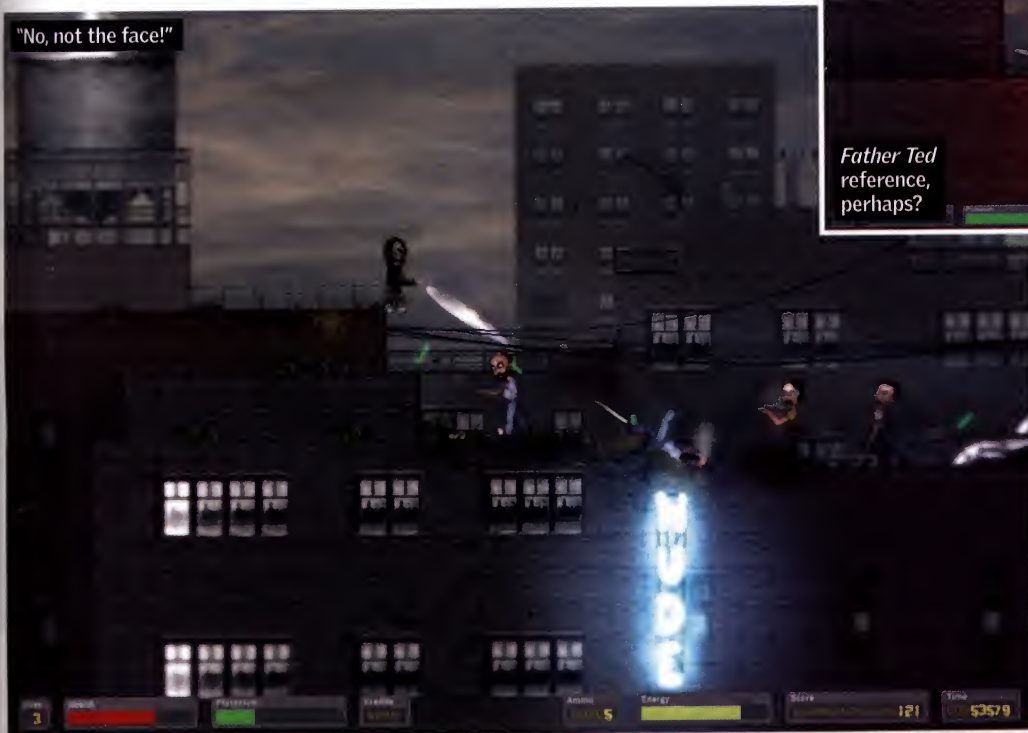
Spelunky is brilliant. It's got a memorable score and the random

content generator leads to new adventures every time. This means you really can't predict what's around the corner, or how your bomb throwing will ruin everything on each game.

This makes each game a tense thrill-ride (not hyperbole, we promise) as you try to whip and jump your way to the biggest profit. There's even a selection of secret challenges for experts, and Mr Yu has promised more updates in the future. So experience some excellent 8-bit platforming – we recommend it.

“You really can't predict what's around the corner in each game”





Father Ted reference, perhaps?



For all your cartridge needs.



Hot!

FACEWOUND

A war against bobble-headed zombies

DEVELOPER Facepunch Studios WEBSITE Facewound.com

UNLIKE THE REST of the world, I'm pissed off *Left 4 Dead* got released, as now everybody's talking about it and zombies are cool again. This is just like when *Shaun of the Dead* was released. I don't give a shit that you just saw *Night of the Living Dead* and you think Simon Pegg was a better hero!

Luckily, before I could write another word, *Facewound* managed to impress the hell out of me – and that's being euphemistic. This is a side-scrolling shooter, with controls much akin to *Shadowgrounds Survivor*. You control

"Facewound is tighter and crisper than a lot of paid-for products"

your crosshair with the mouse, moving it from side to side and shooting the brains out of hordes of cartoony undead. This is all across the grim background of a post-apocalyptic city, with a mix of different horrors to plague you on your quest to find a weird blue flame and end the level.

The first thing you'll notice is how gorgeous it looks. Facepunch Studios have created their own engine that's

slick and full of graphical muscle-flexing and colourful bloom. It's surprising that it's apparently four years old – stuck in the quagmires of development until recently – as it looks bang up-to-date, and while Facepunch's website is strewn with caveats about *Facewound*'s fragile state, I didn't find a single bug during far too much time playing it.

As you murder your way to freedom, you'll pick up plutonium that can be spent on bigger guns in a *Counter-Strike* style menu. These range from machine guns to rapid-fire grenades that blow up anything with a mighty screen-wobbling blast – including you.

Facewound is a remarkable freeware game in that it's tighter and crisper than a lot of paid-for products. It even drops in some choice humour, with references to *Brass Eye* and *Something Awful* cropping up. It's a fine, addictive and free zombie blaster, and you can't beat the satisfaction of the physics-based bouncing of the undead's heads. They bounce and explode, much like oranges do when you stomp on them – and that's *PC ZONE*'s favourite pastime.



Considering it is freeware, it looks great.

WEBGAME OF THE MONTH



LEFT 4K DEAD

DEVELOPER Markus Persson

WEBSITE snipurl.com/l4kdgame

GAUNTLET WAS ONE of the most harrowing experiences of my teenage life. There are few times when I've felt so claustrophobic, so truly surrounded, as that game made me, and *Left 4k Dead* plays off of this expertly.

You control a single man shooting his way through hordes of dead-heads – and we mean big, gurgling crowds of them. They block doorways, they fill up rooms, they come out from behind and encircle you, and then they eat you as you desperately search for the exit.

You'll feel simultaneously enthralled and choked, as every corner throws more and more enemies at you, until you make it to the exit or die. And you'll die, my friend. Oh, how you'll die.

Left 4k Dead is unforgiving, fun and far more scary than anything else that appears in a browser.

That's right – it's even scarier than Lemonparty.

Extend



David Brown checks out the hottest mods, maps and add-ons



"No, it isn't a scar. I just had an accident with a permanent marker..."



"Poker in the front, liquor in the rear..."

Dandelion's promiscuity gets the better of him once again.



Geralt, for goodness sake, I'm innocent! I haven't killed that woman. I may have been in a close relationship with Katrina... From time to time. But I wouldn't have killed the woman - I am a bard, not a murderer. You have to find the real killer and prove that I am innocent!

THE WITCHER: DECEPTION

Dandelion is up to his old tricks again

WEBSITE witchermod.com MOD FOR *The Witcher*

THE WITCHER IS one of the best RPGs ever made, but there haven't been that many quality fan-made additions to the game. The team behind this add-on may well have rectified this scandalous situation, even if just a little.

Deception is a new two to three hour adventure in which Geralt has to clear the name of his old friend Dandelion the Bard, who has been accused of murder.

Let's get this out of the way first: *Deception* is a little bit buggy. My copy of the game crashed a few times while I was playing (though I was using the Steam version of *The Witcher*, so there might have been compatibility issues) and the optimisation wasn't all it could be.

Some of the text is spoken, with the actor portraying Geralt doing a good job (Dandelion isn't so impressive, sadly) but there are numerous

occasions where the characters are silent, as if the developers were unable to record the voices for these bits.

Still, most of these things (except the crashes) are easily ignored. The murder mystery story won't take you too long to plough through, but you'll have as much fun as you did doing any of the more extensive side quests in the main game. The town could have been fleshed out a bit more too, but it's well designed and feels reasonably authentic in the context of the *Witcher* universe.

Aside from the optimisation issues, *Deception* is as visually impressive as the original game was and getting it to work is a doddle (although you should back up some files that could be overwritten in

the process). As a first effort and one of the few proper mods available for *The Witcher*, it's a decent experience, and one we hope is followed up by more adventures in the near future.

There is one thing we would have liked, if it were at all possible - deciding what Geralt's skills are before starting out, like in the game's official extra content. At the moment, your character basically has three stars in each range of abilities and all the skills unlocked in each one. We'd have liked to have been able to either transfer our existing Geralts from the main game or, if that wasn't possible, just start with loads of attribute points to assign. Make it so, as Captain Picard was so wont to say.



The town isn't that big really.

"Deception is as visually impressive as the original game"

SACRIFICE OF ANGELS 2

Sins of a Klingon Empire

WEBSITE moddb.com/mods/star-trek-sacrifice-of-angels-2

MOD FOR *Sins of a Solar Empire*

SINS OF A Solar Empire was one of our favourite strategy games of the last few years, but it suffered from a lack of factions. *Sacrifice of Angels 2* attempts to remedy that by having four civilisations to choose from: the Federation, Klingons, Romulans, and the Dominion.

As you'd expect, the gameplay is as intriguing as the original *Sins* game, but

there's definitely an added sense of epic due to the addition of the *Trek* units and factions, especially when they are modelled as well as they are here.

Future releases of the mod will include proper research trees, ship abilities, strike craft and structures, so although *Sacrifice* is currently in its early stages as a mod, *Sins* and *Trek* fans would be mad not to keep tabs on it.



These goons are no match for Mona.



MONA: THE ASSASSIN

Sax, drugs and rock 'n' roll

WEBSITE moddb.com/mods/mona-the-assassin MOD FOR *Max Payne 2*

THIS IS A short mod following one of the titular heroine's adventures. She's being chased by some hired goons, who've discovered she's hiding (and showering) in an abandoned hospital.

After donning her clothes rather quickly, Mona escapes, gunning down plenty of masked assailants (and innocent civilians, if you feel like it) on

the way. She then sets out to hunt down the man who wants her dead.

As a short mini-episode for *Max Payne 2*, *Mona: The Assassin* works well and is good fun while it lasts. There are a touch too many exploding things that can cause insta-death, but other than that, it's as solid a *Max Payne 2* mod as you are likely to find nowadays.

FALL FROM HEAVEN II

Indulge your magical side, Civ-style

WEBSITE moddb.com/mods/fall-from-heaven-ii-032 MOD FOR *Civilization IV*

DESCRIBED AS A "dark fantasy" mod for *Civilization IV*, *Fall from Heaven II* is a complete reimagining of the *Civ* template you'll come across, turning it into a full-on fantasy extravaganza.

You'll be surprised by just how much *Fall* changes. There's a whole new tech tree, new factions, religions, heroes, magic-wielding units, and a lot more.

Religions are very important, as they are not all equal in their influence. Choose an evil religion and you gain access to arcane knowledge and demonology which will allow you to summon grotesque creatures to fight on your behalf. Head down the good path and you'll be able to ally with the dwarves, who provide financial bonuses.

So much work has gone into this mod, it's untrue. Each race has its own backstory and the team has created a rich fantasy world for players to explore.

Mods, especially *Civ* ones, don't come much more comprehensive than this. If you're a *Civ* fan who likes a bit of fantasy, you'd be cheating yourself if you didn't give this a go.



One of the evil factions.





"Made it, Ma! Top of the world!"

CINEMATIC MOD 9.5

Half-Life 2 like you've never seen it before

WEBSITE snipurl.com/cinematicmod MOD FOR *Half-Life 2*

YES, THIS IS *Half-Life 2* you see in the screens liberally dotted about this page and yes, it does look mind-bogglingly good.

The Fake Factory's project, dedicated to making *Half-Life 2* look better and better, has been going on for a while now. As you can see, this team of modders has succeeded, although they've also tried their hand at doing their own character models, mostly resulting in some hideous mannequins that shouldn't grace a game of this beauty.

Anyway, that's a minor quibble really, as the fact of the matter is that the definitive FPS now looks and feels like it

was released just yesterday. All this does come with a price, however.

This appears in two forms – system requirements and agonisingly long download times. The minimum RAM requirement for this update is 4GB. Bear in mind that 32-bit *Windows XP* (the one you probably own) can only handle 4GB of RAM – including the memory in video cards – so this mod will really push your PC to its limit. The mod will run with less RAM, but performance issues will most likely plague you.

We can't be too harsh on this mod's creators, as creating this extraordinary spectacle out of the ageing Source engine is something to be applauded, but they need to do a little work on reducing that RAM requirement.

The other problem is the sheer size of the damn thing and how difficult it is to get everything you need. You'll need three things to get the mod running: the v9.0 base mod (that's 4.5GB), the v9.5 patch (1.6GB), and the



One of the better character models...

hi-def pack (another gigabyte or two). The mod is available as a 6GB torrent, which might be preferable to straight downloads. Once you've shattered your download limit with those monster files, you'll then need a phenomenal amount of space on your hard drive – between 30-40GB – to install it.

To put it bluntly, you are going to have to be a dedicated *HL2* enthusiast to

bother with all that, which is a big shame, as everyone should experience the quality of these graphics. Sadly, we can't recommend you try this without warning you of the amount of work necessary to get the thing up and running, but if you have the time, patience and a forgiving ISP, go for it. At the very least, it'll make your *Half-Life 2* experience far richer than before.



Ah, memories...

"With this, I can shoot the cock off a hornet..."

CITY ASSAULT

Hot town, shootin' up the city...

WEBSITE moddb.com/mods/city-level-city-assault MOD FOR *Crysis*

JUNGLE WARFARE IS a fun and wholesome activity, barring the inevitable mosquito bites and attacks by Korean ninjas. But what if you wanted to play *Crysis* outside of its jungle (and ice) setting?

Before today, you'd have to use your imagination, but we don't want to put that much pressure on you, so here's a map for *Crysis* that allows you to blow some stuff up in an exciting urban environment. The map was made to be used with the *Advanced AI* mod (moddb.com/mods/crysis-advanced-ai), so you'll need both to experience the full greatness of *City Assault*.

As you can see, it looks pretty swish and, intriguingly, the first part of the map involves you conversing with the General, who then asks you to set the parameters of the map – do you want to fight during the day or the night, how many marines do you want as back-up etc. As *Crysis* mods go, this one is interesting, doing something different with the general theme. Which is nice.

1257 EDITION

Lance-'em-up gets realistic

WEBSITE moddb.com/mods/the-1257-edition MOD FOR *Mount & Blade*

MOUNT & BLADE wasn't exactly the epitome of arcade action, but that hasn't stopped a group of dedicated modders trying to give it that slightly worrying dash of realism.

1257 Edition leaves the original's map the same, but changes everything else – the factions and equipment have been redone, with the new visual style aimed at making the game look like it's been set in the Baltic area around the middle of the 13th century.

Factions will now be based on real historical civilisations, like the Mongols, Scandinavians and the Livonian and Teutonic Orders. Banners, NPCs and even faction faces have been re-tooled.

The mod team believed that the original *M&B* was too willing to mix up historical epochs and so have tried to maintain a consistent style, based on the period the game is supposed to be set in. If you liked *M&B* but want it more accurate, this is the mod for you.

Fox hunting in the 13th century.



THE WEDDING

Geralt and Triss sitting in a tree...

WEBSITE moddb.com/mods/the-wedding/tutorials MOD FOR *The Witcher*

GERALT IS A man of action, a man of mystery, a man of, well, lopping the tentacles off giant zeugls. He isn't your settle-down-get married-start-playing-squash-type of guy,

but, in this adventure, that is exactly what he seems to be.

Triss Merrigold has enchanted Geralt with her feminine wiles (and maybe even some magic) and he's agreed to marry her! Gossip hot enough to keep Temeria's version of *Heat* running for a long time, we think.

This is the first episode in a planned saga, starting in this most unlikely of situations for our

favourite monster slayer. But, as you'd expect, not all is as it seems and, when the likes of Dandelion and friends are around, things are never going to be simple. We won't spoil what happens, but suffice to say that the ending is intriguing

That's my kind of bachelor party!



and there are some rather... interesting encounters with some of the women in Geralt's life.

It isn't very long, so will only last you an hour at most, but any new *Witcher* content is welcome at Zone Towers.

We're looking forward to seeing where the devs will go with the story. Perhaps Geralt will elope with Shani or the Lady of the Lake? Perhaps Azar Javed will spoil the party and claim he's Triss' husband? The possibilities are endless.

"And now, Nausea by At The Gates..."

REFORGING THE SWORD

David Brown grills mindFactory about *Broken Sword 2.5*

DEVELOPER mindFactory WEBSITE brokensword25.com



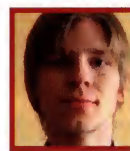
Gregor Koppenburg
SFX and general good-egg sound guy



Gavin Powell
English language worker man



Daniel Pharos
Executive composer hat-sporter



Sarunas Ledas
Animator and art-executive control geezer

ADVENTURE GAMES ARE dead. Everyone says it, so it must be true, right? Tell that to the team at mindFactory, who've just spent a good portion of their lives creating a new *Broken Sword* game, much to the delight of fans. They even got Revolution Software's approval and help to do so.

David Brown talked to Gregor Koppenburg, Gavin Powell, Daniel Pharos and Sarunas Ledas about George, Nico and Paris, and love letters they receive from an adoring public...

Q How does *Broken Sword 2.5* fit into the series' canon?

A **GK:** The story takes place after the events of *The Smoking Mirror*, and I think the writers have made a fine job fitting the plot around the series' timeline: enough for fans of the series to feel instantly at home with the story, yet

allowing those new to it to feel at ease with the game.

GP: Following a year away, George (the hero of *Broken Sword*) returns to Paris after receiving a mysterious telegram. Believing his partner Nico to be dead, he's amazed to find her alive, if not altogether well, and involved with an enemy he thought long-dead – the Neo-Templars. It's a bit like *The Third Man*, set in Paris, and with Templars.

GK: The announcement of *Broken Sword 4* during 2.5's development process ruffled a few feathers. I think there were worries Revolution might introduce things that would make our game sit awkwardly in the timeline.

How successful do you think you've been in maintaining the feel of the original games?

GP: That was always going to be a challenge because Revolution made the

switch to 3D with the release of *The Sleeping Dragon*, but overall I think it's faithful to the first two games. Characters and locations are faithfully reproduced and the team has been very careful to make sure the engine is as close as possible to the simple, but effective, original.

Localisation has affected even the biggest of games companies. How have you dealt with it; and did you have any problems along the way?

GP: There has been a certain amount of artistic licence taken with the details of locations and real-life events concerning what we know of the Templars, but the whole project has been about keeping it as close as possible.

I first came on board after the release of the demo. This was set in York, which is near where I grew up, and so very close to my heart. I thought the demo itself was very good, but noticed one or two occasions where the dialogue didn't quite sound like a native English speaker, which is only to be expected when a game has been translated from German.

GK: One thing that did crop up during the finalising of the script was that in the German version, George speaks in

present tense, as though the events were happening in real time, whereas in the English version, everything is related in past tense: George's first line is: "I loved Paris in the spring." That caused a few problems to begin with, but it was decided the translation should deviate as little as possible from the master version.

GP: For me, any adventure game stands or falls on two things: the plot and the dialogue. If a game has poor puzzle design, it's a pain but you're prepared to put up with it. Take the plot away or make a hash of the dialogue, and no matter how good the puzzles are, you're going to stop playing.

GK: The one thing we wanted to ensure was that we got the dialogue as realistic as possible, while keeping the plot ticking over at a good pace to hold the player's attention. The trouble with



The artwork is as faithful to the original as possible.

Those pesky Templars...

A (very) potted history of the Knights Templar in PC gaming

Most people who've played games for the past 10 or so years know of the Knights Templar – mainly because they seemed to crop up in almost every sodding game at one point. Starbreeze, the team behind *Escape From Butcher Bay*, made them the subject of their very first game, *Knights of the Temple: Infernal Crusade*, which was a bit rubbish. *Broken Sword*, of course, has its Neo-Templars and an extensive exploration of the background history.

They are also mentioned in both *Deus Ex* games (and will probably be in the third one), the whole Illuminati premise being based on the Templar legacy.

Gabriel Knight 3: Blood of the Sacred, Blood of the Damned used some controversial material to argue that the Templar's treasure was really the remains of Christ.

Other games to have used the Knights Templar in a more indirect fashion are *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* (the Blades) and *StarCraft* (the High and Dark Templar units).

If you like a bit of power metal, you may also know that HammerFall call themselves "The Templars of Heavy Metal" and that a German metal band released a concept album about the Templars called *Knights of the Cross*.



"That bartender looks like Fred Flintstone..."

Natürlich, das hätte was.



"We had 100,000 downloads in the first few days... 2D adventures are very much alive"

Broken Sword series is you're not just dealing in straightforward English. You have an American character visiting Paris, Yorkshire, Kuala Lumpur or wherever, and they're all using their own variations of the English language, which has always been spot-on in the official games, so we had a lot to live up to.

GP: I guess you could say I got on board because the Yorkshireman in me enabled me to complain and the Englishman in me allowed me to do something about it! Greg took care of the actual translation and I threw in the idioms and tweaked the phrasing to make it authentic.

GK: A prime example is the scene with the Parisian ice cream man. We spent a long time debating whether "bugger off" was really the right choice of words for an irate Parisian ice cream seller. Shortly after the discussion I had a holiday in France, and I took the opportunity to do a little practical research, so we know that part of the script is authentic - I've got the bruises to prove it!

What's the feedback from the community been like?

DP: We exceeded 100,000 downloads in the first few days, and received loads of emails and love letters. We learned that we've made many people happy, where our strengths lie and where we can improve. Most importantly, we discovered that 2D adventures are very much alive.

How much input did Revolution have?

DP: Our freedom was nearly limitless. The only input was related to what we could do with the game (ie not sell it), rather than what we should or shouldn't put in. From the development point of view, we pretty much did everything ourselves. We even redrew the original locations and characters.

GK: They did mention something about the music. They didn't want that to be too close to the originals. Apart from that, I don't think they said anything.

Was it difficult convincing them to let you make a *Broken Sword* game?

We imagine that other adventure companies might have been obstinate with allowing people to use their properties. Were *Revolution* reluctant to let you do so?

DP: Not at all. They even provided original content for us to use, for example the original animations for George. We're very pleased with their support.

GK: I reckon what made it a little easier for them was that they had already made the switch to 3D when our project really began to take shape. So at no time were we anything like competition for them. Still, the fact that they actually helped us out making the game, rather than just ignoring us, does them enormous credit.

You're recording English dialogue now. Was it a big disappointment when Rolf Saxon (the voice of George from the original *Broken Swords*) pulled out of the project?

SL: Yes, it's probably natural that all of us (and our fans) were disappointed when we heard this. The worst part was that Mr Saxon had been keen to voice George at first, and only later resigned.

What's more, in the German version, George is voiced by the actor who played the character in the original German-language games. So we were really hoping that we'd have the original

English actor, too. We respect his decision though, and have no hard feelings. We haven't lost our enthusiasm and will try to find the best voice we can for the English version.

GK: What everyone should understand is that, even though the game is far shorter than the originals, it's still an awful lot of work to voice George. I think Alexander Shottky (the German George) spent two days recording. That's two days of working for expenses only - which I'm not even sure we paid. That's a huge favour. You can't expect anyone to do that. I think this only stresses how supportive Alexander was.

Do you have any plans to move on to a new *Revolution* series in the future, such as *Lure of the Temptress* or *Beneath a Steel Sky*?

SL: No, not really. Some of us have spent five or six years on this project. It was a great experience, but life isn't that simple and we can't always develop things for free. However, since most of us learned lots of valuable lessons, you may hear we're making commercial projects or other stuff, separately or in co-operation.

So... *Broken Sword 3 1/3*?

GP: Get me Leslie Nielsen and I'll write you a script! **PCZ**

Online Zone

What's new in *PC ZONE*'s forum, Fight Club and Zone Chat

Lots of things going on this month, with various chat and combat-related activities to be read about here. We've even managed to get over our collective fear of blogging and posted a few things up on the website about games, related issues and things like that. But read on for the lowdown on what vileness your fellow readers have been discussing in Zone Chat and how easily they defeated us in Fight Club.

PCZONE 2009 ON THE BLOG



FEAR, LOATHING AND a touch of insanity – just three things that you might come to expect from a *PC ZONE* blog post. This month we've had what we like to call a veritable bounty of blog-like postings, including comment on a bemusing product being launched by Microsoft (see the ad at snipurl.com/songsmithad). *Songsmith* will revolutionise the music world, with amateur vocalists bellowing out-of-tune covers of Celine Dion and Anal Vomit in their homes. Or it won't, one or the other. We'd still like to hear the Anal Vomit cover, though, so do send a copy to us.

We've also spoken about how *Saint's Row 2* has followed the shit port path that *Grand Theft Auto IV* did, just with, according to Ed Zitron, more hideous bugs than the console version. Both open-world funfests, both grotesque abominations that many people can barely play, despite meeting the system requirements comfortably. Disagree? Then post at pczone.co.uk.

NOTES FROM THE FORUM

The outside world and games – will they ever co-exist peacefully?

So, who's playing *F.E.A.R. 2*? Despite the shock of seeing the distinctly console-flavoured format ("Press Space To Start"?!), the *Deus Ex: Invisible War*-style eyeball-HUD and the huge duh-boxes over anything usable (which even console-only *Condemned 2* didn't have), I liked it. One moment literally had me jumping out of my seat.

There was a quick scary sting at a very boring location, and I expected something to happen around the corner. Nothing did, so I turned back to get something I missed – and for a split second the very *L4D*-Witch-looking version of Alma was crouched behind me. And I was playing in the dark.

The Mech combat was decidedly dull though. You couldn't blow up crumbling buildings or even knock over traffic lights. I really enjoyed it, but it does feel like *F.E.A.R.* with a few things missing rather than *F.E.A.R.* with loads of things added.

TheTingler

Played it last night, not bad but except for the graphics update nothing really that new, still had the hairs on the back of neck standing on end. They haven't lost any of the scary "sitting on the edge of your seat clenching hard" feeling.

daftvader



Yes, *F.E.A.R. 2* can be a bit patronising.



To be honest I never found *F.E.A.R.* to be scary. Creepy and interesting at times (especially near the end, with all the Alma nightmares), but never scary.

Brax

I think the main issue I had was the game's system auto detect. It said my game could run *F.E.A.R. 2* on max settings, so as you can imagine I was impressed, the game ticked along lovely at around 50-60fps.

But the game it dropped to a freeze frame 2fps when the a flash message popped up to tell me CTRL was used to duck. When the message faded I was back up to the awesome and impressive frame rate.

I don't know if anyone else is experiencing this, but it did spoil the game as I now know that SPACE makes you jump. Come on we're not idiots... well most of us.

I suppose I will get the full game, I mean it can't be as bad as the rubbish *Perseus Mandate*, can it?

Mad_AI

F.E.A.R. was one of the only games where the AI would flank you and sneak up on you from unexpected areas. I'll play the demo sooner or later, but is this kind of AI tactics still there or is that now gone?

thetalkinghead

I replayed *F.E.A.R.* last year to prepare for this, only as the day got closer and the previews got more in-depth I started to worry. Thankfully I like the demo.

There's just enough tension to keep me on the edge of my seat through the buildings, and the mech section brought back fond memories of *SHOGO*. It'll have to wait for a purchase though as when I finish *Fallout 3*, I have *Far Cry 2* and *Mass Effect* lined up like naughty schoolboys outside the head's office.

peachFUZZ

FIGHT CLUB



COME AND TAKE ON THE ZONE STAFF IN OUR MONTHLY ONLINE GAMING FREE-FOR-ALL!

ZONE CHAT



Up, up and away

TIME HAS BEEN, passed and gone, but our *Team Fortress 2* Fight Clubs continue inexorably onwards like some player-driven balloon juggernaut. Which is exactly what happened in our custom map extravaganza, featuring the current office favourite map, *Balloon Race*.

The object of the game is to move your balloon-powered contraption to and through a series of control points, capturing (or attempting to capture) them in turn. The first team to capture three of the four points wins, unless both teams capture two each, which leads to a race back to the start, with the first past the post being the winner.

The first couple of games were close, involving big standoffs over the third, most vital control point.

Flatline distinguished himself with his ability to spy, while Assassin and Plughead had a titanic sniper struggle, which probably ended up as all square. Sadly, things degenerated into a farce with Engineer turrets being constructed during the start-up period, leading to one team being pinned in the start area while the other scampered off to win the match easily. While this was an obviously effective tactic, to do it repeatedly was against the spirit of the game which is all about having fun, not winning at all costs. Not that we're bitter or anything...

Other than that, a good game was had by all, with The Tingle appearing early on for a cameo Heavy appearance (although relatively unsuccessfully, it has to be said).

Next month, we're going to twist things around a tad and pick a game that might not have been seen in these pages before. Don't worry, it won't be that obscure, so we're not going to say "OK, break out those copies of *Silent Hunter III*, we're going sub hunting," or announce a *Boat Simulator* yacht race – no, it will be something sensible. So keep those eyes peeled.

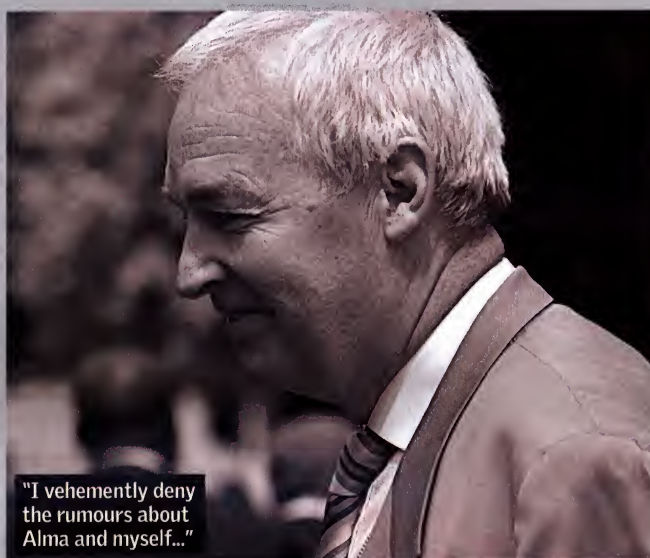
Some scout action.



A despicable array of scoundrels and vagabonds.



Les Trente Glorieuses



"I vehemently deny the rumours about Alma and myself..."

PEOPLE WHO HAVE one thing in common, namely this glorious tome, talked about life, love and Jon Snow, who apparently winked at someone called Ace{BoA} once. We think he might have imagined it, like when Steve said he'd been propositioned by Ann Widdecombe.

Anyway, the first meaningful topic involved discussing the merits of Steam's excellent web browser function, which shames Microsoft's inability to achieve the same thing in *Games for Windows — LIVE*.

I Am Welly then questioned the throng about the location of his baked beans, before Ghostchanter declared himself "unimpressed" with *Down of War II*'s multiplayer beta. *Diablo III* was both praised and degraded by the masses, some saying it would fail, while others were excited about the prospect clicking on dropped loot.

Finally, the conversation turned to shagging old Alma from *F.E.A.R. 2*, which prompted Steve Hogarty to announce he would "rip your fucking heart out", although we can't actually remember if this was aimed at anyone in particular or just a random outburst.

How to join in!

To be a part of next month's ZONE Chat, join our Steam Community group: **PC ZONE (PCZ)**. If you don't have Steam, first be ashamed of yourself, and then download it from steampowered.com. Keep an eye out for announcements in that there Steam group for the date of the next chat event...



CAN'T MAKE FIGHT CLUB?

If you find yourself unable to make it to Fight Club – perhaps you've embarked on a cycling tour of North Cornwall – then feel free to join other PCZ readers on the following public servers. We might even join the rabble from time to time, you never know.

WHO'S WHO

David Brown PCZ_Plughead
Jon Blyth PCZ_Log
Phil Wand PCZ_People's Front Of Judea
Steve Hogarty PCZ_Escaped_monkey
Will Porter PCZ_Batsphinx

1 COUNTER-STRIKE: SOURCE
cs.zonegames.co.uk:27015
cs.zonegames.co.uk:27025

2 HALF-LIFE 2: DEATHMATCH
hl2.zonegames.co.uk:27065

3 DAY OF DEFEAT: SOURCE
dod.zonegames.co.uk:27085

4 TEAM FORTRESS CLASSIC
tfc.zonegames.co.uk:27045

5 ENEMY TERRITORY: QUAKE WARS
pczone2.jolt.co.uk

6 CALL OF DUTY 4
Coming soon... really

7 BATTLEFIELD 2142
bf2142.zonegames.co.uk:16567

8 TEAM FORTRESS 2
pczone2.jolt.co.uk:27115
pczone2.jolt.co.uk:27125
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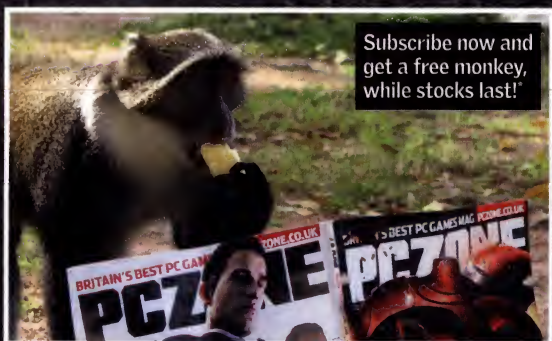
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"The Cyborg has a body that can be configured to fit your hand" Phil Wand, issue 194

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PAGE 73
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Retrozone

Facing the wrong way since 1995...



Flashback MARIO

H EARD OF THIS guy? Sure, the be-dungareed plumber might only (for the most part) appear on Nintendo consoles, but the tendrils of emulation know no bounds. Through the passing of time Mario's adventures have become available to us in varying degrees of dubiousness. Take *Super Mario World*, a game that was on a different scale to most things released in the early '90s.

For those who somehow missed it (and its rereleases) *Super Mario World* was a side-scrolling 2D platformer for the Super Nintendo, that sustains at least 20 solid, horrendously addictive hours: without you even completing the entirety of it!



Released in 1992, it had 72 levels, secrets galore, tiny references and all kinds of nooks and crannies that take hours of pondering and rushing through levels to do, involving a great deal of grabbing chunky keys, using dinosaurs to vault to high places, and flying a bulbous man around using a cape.

Five years later in 1997, *Mario 64* on the N64 took Mario to the 3D realm, and redefined the entire genre by being the tightest, slickest 3D platformer released. It had the same addictive hidden elements as *Mario World*, and 120 different stars across 15 courses. In fact *Mario 64* was the first game to popularize quest hubs. Thanks, Mario.

Super Mario Sunshine (GameCube, 2002) was different as its theme was about cleaning up towns marred by graffiti using a special water gun, combined with slick, twitchy smaller platforming sections. It was somewhat off classic Mario's feel, with the plumber waddling around a pseudo-Spanish town inhabited by weird-looking pineapple people. Urgh.



But how? Get the plumber on your PC

Super Mario World will require one of the many different SNES emulators out there. We recommend ZSNES (zsnes.com), as it's the most reliable of them and will work on even antiquated PCs.

Mario 64 is troublesome, requiring Project64 (pj64-emu.com) or another of the slew of unreliable N64 emulators. They've grown more robust since the 64's death, but they're still far from stable.

The GameCube emulation scene is controlled by Dolphin (dolphin-emu.com), which is compatible with many games, but conflicts with some graphics cards.

The ROMs for Mario's adventures are all a short Google away.

emulator-zone.com

Download ZSNES, Project 64, and their competitors here.

Take the plunger Six special levels in Super Mario World



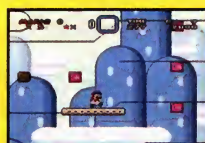
1 TUBULAR
A level made of bouncing, dodging and endless drops into an abyss that can only be purgatory.



2 OUTRAGEOUS
Do you like hammers, caterpillars, random flames and other dangerous shit? Then try this level!



3 GNARLY
With your dinosaur compatriot, Yoshi, this level is the most fun in the game. And it's not even that hard.



4 WAY COOL
This level has you switching platform carts and avoiding little black evil weevils.



5 AWESOME
During this level shells constantly fire at you as you desperately try and make it to the end.



6 MONDO
In this level the water raises and lowers randomly, to drown or at least really confuse you.

Now & Then

TIKI TOWERS vs THE GREAT GIANA SISTERS



TO ITS MAKERS *The Great Giana Sisters* was a legitimate clone of Nintendo's *Super Mario Bros.* But Nintendo saw it as a blatant rip-off, so they had their legion of lawyers attack and so the Sisters were yanked out of stores. However you see this game, *The Great Giana Sisters* was a weird, Mario-esque platformer that had you play as one of two sisters running around headbutting blocks for buffs, and picking up enemies and throwing them off the side of things.

While we're certainly not accusing anybody of ripping off *World of Goo*, the game *Tiki Towers* that's just appeared on the iPhone looks eerily similar to our favourite goo-based puzzler. That said, *Tiki Towers* differs from *The Great Giana Sisters* in that it looks to be a lot of fun.



Play it! If you don't like Italians, try playing with the Sisters

- 1 Download CCS64 - the Commodore 64 Emulator - from www.computerbrains.com/ccs64 and a ROM if you own the original game...
- 2 ...if you don't, buy it off eBay, paying a greasy man in the USA a premium to own a not particularly amazing platformer.
- 3 Failing that, steal it from the internet, in a kind of peaceful protest against the *Giana Sisters* ripping off the great Mario.
- 4 Alternatively, get hold of *Super Mario Bros.* and a Nintendo console, and play the game wearing a wig and your mother's dress.

MAMEframe ALIEN vs PREDATOR

WE'RE NOT TALKING about the classic FPS, which is guaranteed to turn your Y-fronts damp and brown here. This is an earlier, and weird, use of the *Alien* license.

Aliens vs Predator was a side-scrolling beat 'em up that could be found in some of the more upscale arcades (Aberystwyth pier, for example). You played Colonial Marines or Predators, bashing their way through hordes of remarkably frightening aliens, much like in *Final Fight*.

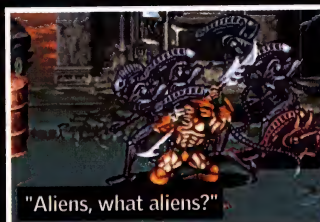
The shocker was the amount of aliens you could be surrounded by - sometimes as many as 10 - and that you were able to pick up satisfyingly explosive guns as you went along.

Sitting down with a mate and two Xbox 360 controllers, you can probably bash through the entirety of the game in an hour, but that doesn't mean it won't be a raucous, acid-bloodied hour of your life well spent rocking through one of the highlights of this franchise, which is mortally wounded today.



What is MAME?

The Multiple Arcade Machine Emulator currently emulates over 3,500 games. You can get it from mame.net - use *Mame32* for a nice front-end. Then you can download *Robby Roto*, which is legal. You can play all the others too, but not legally. So stop it.



Back in the day



JEDI NIGHTS

By Ed Zitron

I WAS GOING to be a bloody Jedi. I'd grinded enough *EverQuest*, and I was ready to master the bloody universe. So I installed *Star Wars Galaxies*.

I watched it connect to the USA on my 56k connection to patch up, made my character, and settled for being a smuggler, instead of a Jedi.

I worked for the Empire, killing the same shit over and over again and traipsing across Tatooine with a wamp rat. Eventually somebody introduced me to the architecture class trees. I built houses and spice extractors, and sold blueprints for highly overblown prices, within a few weeks, I'd blossomed. I'd become the Space Maddoff, getting people to load me with credits to make houses I didn't have the skill to build. So I got banned for scamming. Bloody liberals.

CURRENT OBSESSIONS

ON THE PCZ HARD DRIVE

The games we're playing, and why we're playing them



She's gonna get a witch-slap.

THE WITCHER: ENHANCED EDITION

Moral Dilemma: **David Brown**



"Witch this, motherwitchers."

HOW OFTEN DO you feel you've made the wrong choice in a game? Scratch that, how often do you think you've made the wrong choice and then carried on playing regardless? Chances are you won't have felt like this very often, unless you've played *The Witcher*, the first game in which you genuinely feel the decisions you make actually have an impact of the story – and not in some "A is good, B is bad" kind of way. *The Witcher* isn't binary in the way it deals with your choices.

One of the main themes in the game is the nature of neutrality. At the start of the epic story, your character – Geralt – eschews high (and low) politics in favour of slashing the throats and lop the heads off monsters. By absolutely no means a simple man, Geralt's chief objective is to be open to any offer of work, vaguely related to the slaying of monsters. Yet during the course of the game, you'll almost certainly end up choosing sides in the civil conflict that arises (although it's possible to remain neutral, if you try hard enough).

What struck me as I played through the game was that I developed loyalties to several characters and, when the difficult choices reared their heads, I made a decision based on how I felt about that particular ally, rather than thinking exclusively about which selection would give me more experience or the best item. This led me to choose the side I normally wouldn't have done, because I felt loyal to a member of the organisation, despite the rest of them being a bunch of tools. The other faction had a cause I personally felt more

connection to, yet I didn't get on with its leader, so I rejected their cause – the more noble one, in my view.

Neither choice was obviously good or bad, both sides having virtuous and vile sides. This applies to pretty much all important situations in the game – at times, you can't avoid hurting somebody you like and you genuinely feel guilty when they condemn you for betraying them. Honestly, what other game has made you wither under the angry glare of a spurned witch? I can't think of any.

VERDICT Moral brilliance



FOOTBALL MANAGER LIVE

On the bench: **Steve Hogarty**

THE LAST FOOTBALL management game I played was *Premier Manager* on the Atari ST, and I'm fairly certain there were no 3D match engines, or even 2D match engines back then. It was all text-based you see, forcing you to concoct football imagery inside of your own brain. Thankfully, football was readily

available on TV at the time, so it didn't require a great stretch of imagination when playing.

That was about 15 years ago, and besides the inclusion of a swarming bunch of different coloured dots, absolutely nothing's changed. I'm still utterly clueless as to how management games work, and I'm certain that the

tiny changes to tactics my footie-brained colleague David Brown insists on making have zero effect on the outcome of a match, so I opted to auto-purchase a squad, auto-select a team, and auto-choose my tactics.

In keeping with this hands-off approach, I played four matches without ever having to touch my

keyboard or mouse, instead lolling my head from side to side as the dots did their thing. Against the odds, I became bored, persevering just long enough to see Mister Brilliant's Bunch underperform in a spectacular way.

I'll scratch "some sort of coach" off my potential career paths, then.

VERDICT Balls



BOOKWORM DELUXE

We're not wordy: **Adam Glick**

MAYBE IT WAS due to that time during the incunabulum of my existence, when a rapsallion upturned a *Scrabble* board and my neonate form was showered with word fragments like some perverted sort of plastic precipitation, but I've always had a fascination with lettered tiles tumbling down the screen just begging to be herded into lovely locutions. *Bookworm Deluxe* is a logophiliac's dream from Pop Cap,

available on Steam. Trace a line of adjacent letters along a grid to form as an extensive a word as possible, see the letters disappear from the play area, and watch new uncial monograms fall in to replace them.

Avoid small words, as this coaxes burning letters into the playing field. These guys burn through letters beneath them, threatening to destroy the library you reside in, should they reach the bottom of the grid.

Where *Bookworm Deluxe* gets interesting is the moment you realise the regularity with which you're finding the rudest words possible, without even trying. I can't for the life of me make it through a game without spotting labia, or sighing as I realise I'm just one letter away from spelling testicle. Why can't I spot clever words like deracinate (to uproot), or recidivism (a tendency to lapse into a previous condition or pattern of behaviour)? Perhaps it's because – ooh, hold on, I just got cocks.

VERDICT Words worth it



WHAT'S ON YOUR HARD DRIVE?

Readers on their chosen poison

CHARLIEPREED PLANESCAPE

I've been trying to play classics that I missed, I finally did *Psychonauts* but now I'm doing *Planescape*. I've got it installed but the damn thing won't work! It may be Vista but I don't know, don't seem to be able to get the no-CD patch to work and it won't register that I have a disc in the drive so it won't play.

MUSICALGIBBON CALL OF CTHULHU: DARK CORNERS OF THE EARTH

I got *Dark Corners* for Christmas, and it's pretty good. It is most successful when it ditches most of the FPS conventions, especially the beginning in Innsmouth where you don't get a weapon.

Unfortunately it seems to have quickly returned to FPS safe ground, so to speak, and has suffered in quality because of that. I do wish there was a really good Lovecraft-inspired game.



DEVELOPER'S COMMENTARY

FAR CRY 2

Steve Hogarty rides a zebra into battle

EXCUSE US FOR going all doe-eyed and sincere, but Clint Hocking, creative director at Ubisoft Montreal, is one of the most inspiringly creative, passionate and enthusiastic game developers you could ever hope to meet.

He's one of the people responsible for *Far Cry 2*, as you might have guessed, and even after the game's

release he'll talk about the explosion-filled shooter with as much gusto as when he'd just started work on it.

We cornered him (on a telephone) and grilled him on the development of 2008's biggest – and certainly the hottest and shootiest – shooter.



Clint Hocking,
Creative director at Ubisoft Montreal.

"Fascinating,
tell me more."

So. You kill them. - OK.

01 FIGHTING EXPECTATION

"When we started development, we knew there was a negative view of the console versions – Jack Carver with mutant powers, that kind of stuff – so our mandate was to rejuvenate or reinvent the brand. All this talk about it being a cash-in, that wasn't really the space we were in at all. We were asking ourselves, 'What is the real heart of this game?' and, for us, it was going to somewhere foreign and exotic, somewhere you'd never seen before in a videogame, and something you didn't believe was even technically feasible to put in a videogame.

"For us, Africa was the solution to that because it captured the original essence – beautiful, dangerous, exotic – but at the same time it wasn't handcuffed to any of the other baggage we didn't think was central, like mutants and science-fiction stuff. For us, we didn't think about expectations. We were like 'That's perfect, that's exactly what we want to do'."

02 ANGRY ENEMIES

"We knew the enemy was tenacious. We really wanted to have the shooter aesthetic, where you're fighting every step of the way. Some people are complaining that they never seem to get a breather from the AI, they can't get down a road without having to take out a guard post, but when you play something like *Call of Duty*, you can't go down a road without killing some guys or people trying to kill you.

"I mean we were making a shooter and the fact it was set in an open world wasn't, from our perspective, supposed to make it like *Oblivion* or something – it was a shooter where you're fighting for every inch you gain. It's an action game, not a wandering-around-looking-at-the-sunset game. It makes finding that hill where you can sit and watch the sunset from the bench outside of your safe house much more rewarding. When you can find a few moments of peace, there's a powerful contrast."



Enemies never stop
giving you a hard time.

03 JOURNEY, NOT DESTINATION

"It's actually surprising to see some of the criticism we've been getting. Getting to the objective isn't just half the fun, it's all the fun and every little skirmish is the great joy of the game, every little fight at every little checkpoint, that's the game. For people to say they want less of that... it's weird and really surprising."

"I understand it's challenging their expectations of what a game is supposed to be. I've been reading a few of the reviews and I find a lot of them saying the game is punishing and almost abusive, and then they say something 'clicked'. This seems to be the consensus with *Far Cry 2*, that once you get to that point, when you get the rhythm of it, it seems to change for a lot of people, but not for everyone."

"The challenge for us was to make all the combat that you get into, potentially thousands of times, always exciting."

"Every little skirmish is the great joy of the game, every little fight at every little checkpoint, that's the game"

Stop? *Far Cry 2* never stops.



Niiice.



04 LIONS AND TIGERS

"Predators were one of those things that got cut really early. We have a hard limit of about 23 AI active in the world at any given time, and animals count towards that budget. So, for us, if we start putting in zebras and then some cheetahs to try to kill the zebras and then by the time the players see any of them, maybe some of the zebras are dead or have been chased off, we're putting in all this AI that kind of diminishes the gameplay we can do with enemies.

"The other constraint was that we wanted to use the same animal skeletons as much as possible – we have the same basic skeleton that is shared by all of the quadrupeds. If we'd added giraffes or elephants or rhinos, we'd have had to create new skeletons and that would cost a lot more, unfortunately."

"The sounds of sinew and bones popping into place are just vile"

Wild dogs cry out in the night...



05 CLINT'S CHOICE

"My favourite healing animation? Well, some of the dislocations are really, really grisly. If you haven't seen them, I suggest you find an explosive crate somewhere, and lob some grenades at it while standing 10 metres away. They're disgusting, the sounds effects of the sinew and the bones popping back into place are just vile.

"My personal favourite is one if you're near a structure when it explodes and you get hit by a piece of it – you go down on one knee and you see this piece of metal sticking out of your leg. It turns out to be 10 inches long and its been driven straight down, parallel to your shin, and you kind of pull it out three inches at a time. It's just really, really gross."



06 A MISLEADING PREMISE?

"Maybe there's this kind of feeling that they were going to get more of a straightforward shooter, or that it would be more like *Fallout* or *Oblivion*, that they could go anywhere and explore. For us, it was always a shooter and we didn't want to pack the game out with all of this role-playing, collecting, inventory management stuff that has to support this whole exploration thing. We didn't want to bog the game down with sorting all this crap you're carrying around. We wanted to keep it fast and light and agile, and keep you in contact with the vehicles and enemies. Maybe this has kind of thrown a curve ball at people."



07 FACTION SIMILARITIES

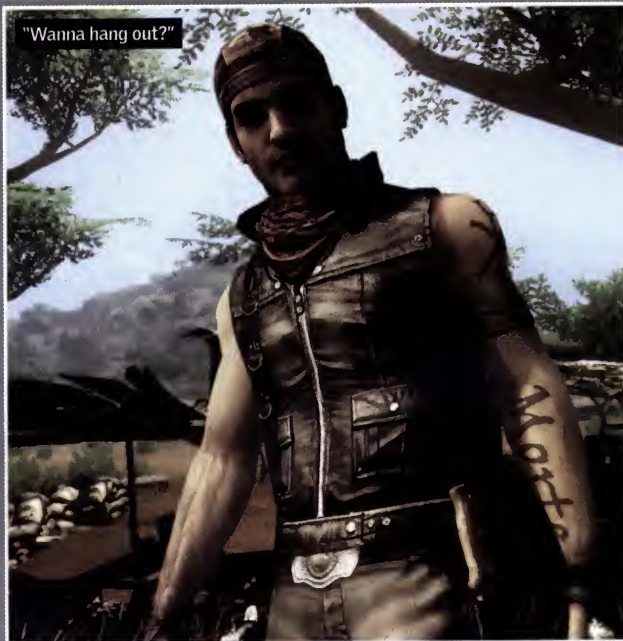
"The similarities of the factions was intentional. I wanted to avoid a situation where the player was empathising with one of the factions because they are both real bad motherfuckers. I didn't want the player picking sides, I wanted him to always feel like he hated both sides and was only grudgingly working for one or the other, but it didn't really matter who."

"I read Romeo Deller's book *Shake Hands With The Devil* about the Rwandan Genocide when we were doing conception. He talked about how these groups come up with euphemisms they use in naming themselves, and they're all repeating these same jingoistic phrases, but really they're all just horrible, horrible bastards and you can't really tell them apart."

He throws a tantrum every bathtime.



"Wanna hang out?"



08 BUDDY LOVE

"For me the whole question from day one, 'How do we make the player, who's going to spend dozens or hundreds of hours in the game, actually care about one of these people?' Of all of the thousands and thousands of people that are going to get shot in this game, how do we make you care about just one? Because if we can accomplish that then we can make you care about dozens or hundreds of thousands as we move the story forward."

"For me, the goal was to see how much we could move the player, not through a story, but through a unique experience for you, that is totally honest and totally real, that only you will experience and that was it. One person out of hundreds of thousands, if I can make you care about him, I've done my job."

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LONDON, NW1 6NW

TEL: 020 7042 4720
FAX: 020 7042 4729
EMAIL: letters@pczone.co.uk
WEB: pczone.co.uk

'50s AMERICANS

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Deputy Editor **Steve Hogarty**
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PCZONE.CO.UK Editor **Gavin Ogden** 020 7042 4311
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LICENSING

Head of International Licensing **Tim Hudson**
Tel +44 (0)1225 442244 Fax +44 (0)1225 732275

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Minimum system requirements:

A flat surface, a long piece of wood, and a great deal of patience.

IROLLED THE hoop down the path. I hit it with the stick, causing it to roll some more. This was it, I was playing *Hoop 'n' Stick*, I was actually playing *Hoop 'n' Stick*. Once in a very long while, a developer emerges from the indie gaming scene, brandishing a game built entirely on a foundation of passion, talent and hard graft. *Hoop 'n' Stick* is one such game, and it's so crazy-original that I think we should all relax and take a deep breath while I explain its, frankly barmy, intricacies.

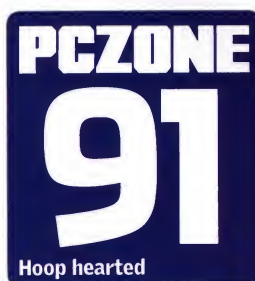
You have a stick. The objective is to roll the hoop by means of the stick. Down slopes, up slopes, perpendicular to those self-same slopes – the limit really is your imagination, and the gradient and smoothness of the surface you're rolling on. But mostly your imagination. The prototype version (*Stick*) is still around, but naturally it's missing the key feature which makes *Hoop 'n' Stick* so incredibly special – the titular hoop.

The whole thing is infused with a sort of wry humour, and some of the noises the hoop makes when you hit it with the stick will make you shit yourself with laughter. Multiplayer is also an option here too, though oddly there's no co-operative mode to speak of. We'd love nothing more than to double-team a hoop and pound it into oblivion. Get on it, Toody Boy! **PC7**
GG Byron

"It's so crazy-original that I think we should relax and take a deep breath"



I mock your lack of hooping abilities child.



Hoop hearted

CUP AND BALL 2

Stop getting *Cup and Ball* wrong

DEVELOPER Cupz
PUBLISHER EA
WEBSITE pczone.co.uk
ETA: Out now
PRICE £2.99

Minimum system requirements:

A strong and flexible wrist, and excellent hand-eye co-ordination.

MAJORITY RULE CAN be a horrible thing. It can put terrible men in power. It can pass heinous, rights-eroding laws. It can start wars, it can destroy cities, it can end civilisations. And it can ruin *Cup and Ball*. So, general public, you got your wish, *Cup and Ball 2* now features the highly demanded string holding the ball to the cup, a feature which sullies the very nature – nay, the essence – of *Cup and Ball*.

Having played *Cup and Ball* religiously since its first release, I feel

qualified to state that having to chase the ball after a failed attempt to get the it inside the cup is 90% of the fun of *Cup and Ball*. That ball could really take you places, if you just let it.

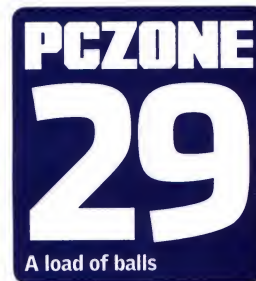
"Oh, but you can simply cut the string," you shout – well why should I have to cut a bloody string just to play *Cup and Ball*? And who's going to pay for the scissors to cut the string?

Cup and Ball 2 is an indicator of the way the market's headed these days. By appealing to the masses we undermine our core values. I beseech thee, boycott *Cup and Ball 2* and stick to the original *Cup and Ball*. See you at *CaB 09*, readers. You'll find me in the old-school *Cup and Ball* booth, mourning what is probably the most tragic event of our lifetime. Now you must excuse me, as I have balls to chase. **PC7**
M Shelley

"Why should I have to cut a bloody string just to play *Ball and Cup*?"



You stationary bastards have ruined a classic.



A load of balls



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